

# **LET US PRAY!**

**A Series of Studies on the Nature,  
Importance, and Practice of Prayer**

**Homiletically Treated**

**By**

**Leslie G. Thomas**

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# Introduction

Many years ago Bro. Leslie G. Thomas wrote and printed a book called "LET US PRAY". The book obviously dealt with the various aspects of prayer. It was much needed then and it is equally needed now. For this reason, we are reprinting this book.

Bro. Thomas has written many books in his lifetime. His name is synonymous with sound Christian literature. Although in his nineties, he is still at work for the Lord in Chattanooga, TN.

I am grateful to Bro. Thomas for allowing me to reprint this book. May his efforts for Christ live on through this and other volumes of his writings.

J. C. Choate  
Church of Christ  
19 Jalan Sumatra  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
May 20, 1986

**To**

**BESS and R.L. Dyer**

**Whose Interest in My Work  
Is a Source of Constant  
Help and Encouragement**

*More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?*  
— Tennyson.

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who  
art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this  
day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also  
have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into tempta-  
tion, but deliver us from the evil one.*  
— Jesus.

*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do,  
that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*  
— Jesus.

*In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to  
another; in honor preferring one another; in diligence not  
slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in  
hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer.*  
— Paul.

# Contents

Is Prayer Reasonable? . . . . .	1
“O Thou That Hearest Prayer!” . . . . .	6
When Prayer Is the Starting Point . . . . .	10
Praying the Wrong Way . . . . .	16
Effective Praying . . . . .	21
Against Hypocrisy in Prayer . . . . .	25
The Testing Ground of Prayer . . . . .	29
Is Standing for Prayer Acceptable to God? . . . . .	33
The Shut Door . . . . .	39
Learning to Pray . . . . .	43
The Model Prayer . . . . .	49
The Beginning Point . . . . .	55
Honoring the Name of God . . . . .	59
“Thy Kingdom Come” . . . . .	65
“Thy Will Be Done” . . . . .	72
“Our Daily Bread” . . . . .	75
Forgiveness . . . . .	80
The Problem of Temptation . . . . .	88
Prayer as a Factor in Behavior . . . . .	95
“Through Jesus Christ Our Lord” . . . . .	100
Bibliography . . . . .	103

# Is Prayer Reasonable?

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

— Matt. 7:11.

**Introduction:** 1. There are always urgent reasons for studying the meaning of prayer; for prayer is either the primary fact in our experience, or the worst delusion. Any thoughtful student who has given this subject any consideration knows that many unscriptural and unreasonable theories have been put forward in the name of prayer. These, of course, have kept many people from receiving the real benefits of prayer; but passing over them, let us ask, "What kind of prayer can we, as rational people with an open Bible, believe in?"

2. The only adequate answer to this question lies in a careful consideration of what prayer is and does, as revealed in the Bible; and in seeing its proper place in the total working of religious faith. This will not be an easy task; for it must be admitted by many of us that we, if not strangers altogether, are at best only occasional visitors in the halls of prayer. But, difficult as it may be, no task is more deserving of our hardest work than that of recapturing the meaning and reclaiming the power of prayer.

3. The words "let us pray" are familiar ones. They are used in services of public worship to introduce the period of prayer. They either open the door to secrets of religious power, or they are as "sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." Prayer is not simply the stock in trade of preachers; it is, as Harold A. Bosley says, "every man's supreme

effort to find the right answer to the meaning of life." No one will ever receive a more crucial invitation than the one which bids him confront God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of his life. But in studying this lesson, let us consider:

## **I. The Basis of Our Investigation**

1. The first question that must be answered, in our effort to determine whether or not prayer is reasonable, is one about the nature of God; and that question is, "Is He real?" It is obvious, even to the superficial, that if there is no God, then there can be no prayer to Him.

(1) Both the Bible and the world of nature, together with competent men and women of every age, unite in their testimony that God is. See Gen. 1:1; Psa, 19:1.

(2) But the requirements of prayer have not been fully met if one takes the reality of God on faith and hearsay alone. *His reality must be a fact which he has tested by every means at hand; it must be believed in and held to be of supreme importance before he will feel the true need and importance of prayer.* This, very likely, is one of the reasons why so many of us fail to avail ourselves of the practice of prayer.

2. The second question that must be answered, in our effort to determine whether or not prayer is reasonable, is one about the possibility of a trustful relationship with Him.

(1) If God is real, then is he the sort of God who can be consciously and personally approached with the expectation of a definite response to one's efforts?

(2) A machine-like, impersonal deity can be thought to exist, but it cannot be approached in prayer. Likewise, a capricious god can be bargained with — perhaps even bribed; but one cannot enter into the relationship of trusting companionship with him, a relationship which is essential to prayer.

3. The Bible is our source-book regarding God, and in it the most explicit answer to these two questions is found.

(1) God is the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and the Redeemer of his children. He rules the world, not by blind and lifeless law or caprice, but by a whole series of interrelated laws which constitute his will for the world. These laws begin with the physical world and continue on up through the moral and spiritual worlds; and they not only include gravitation in the realms of physical objects, but, in the case of human beings, moral and spiritual precepts which say that "the wages of sin is death." His laws are not solely negative and prohibitory in character, but affirmative and creative, pointing the way to life more abundant.

(2) Not only is God real, but he is the sort of Deity who can be consciously and personally approached, and who may be expected to give a definite response to our efforts. In fact, no one can please him without this attitude of trustfulness. Cf. Heb. 11:6; Phil. 4:6,7.

4. The inevitable conclusion, then, is that God is real, and prayer therefore is possible; and if we are willing to make the practical venture and give the practice a fair trial, we can have the deepest and most persuasive kind of evidence for the reality of prayer that is possible for man to possess.

## II. How Shall We Describe Prayer?

1. *Prayer is a direct and personal approach to God.* It is the creature seeking the Creator, the one in whom he lives, moves, and has his being.

(1) William James described prayer as "intercourse with an Ideal Companion"; and with this view of the question, it is easy to see that prayer is not primarily a matter of our talking, God's listening, and then answering, as is so commonly assumed. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:17.



(2) The real problem of prayer may be expressed in this way: "Is it possible for me to expose the whole range of my life to the Creative Source from which it comes and to the Creative Will which seeks to assert itself through me?"

(3) There is no doubt about the reality of the Source and the Will; but are we willing, consciously, to turn our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength toward God? When one does that he really prays; but without it he cannot pray in the true sense. *A double life in prayer is impossible.* Cf. James 1:1–8; Matt. 7:21.

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

— King Claudius, in *Hamlet*.

### III. The Testing Ground of Prayer

1. There are three principal ways by which men seek to get what they want — viz., by thinking, by working, and by praying. Few people have any doubt about the effectiveness of the first two methods; but so many baffling questions arise in the minds of many concerning prayer that the practice is all but nullified.

(1) This difference is due, in part at least, to the fact that thought and work have never had a general religious emphasis, as the term "religion" is commonly understood. People are supposed to think wherever they happen to be, and to work wherever their tasks carry them. These two ways of getting what men want run through the common hours of every day; but many people think of prayer as a peculiar religious experience, in the popular sense of that term.

(2) But even a casual consideration of the facts in the case will reveal that powerful personality is never created simply by thought and work. Such personality always has deep interior resources which come, not from thinking and working, but from hospitality to a world of truth and

power higher than self. Cf. 2 Sam. 22:36. There must be *intake* as well as *output*. See Eph. 3:14–19.

2. If prayer is to result in a blessing to us, what, then, are some of the elements that must enter into the experience?

(1) *We must deeply feel the need of prayer.* There are some people who seem to feel no need of this communion with God. They can think a little and work a little, and get by; but they are not the people who have elevated and enriched the human race. When thoughtful people come up against something that is too much for them, and undertake something that is too hard for them, they can readily understand the meaning of this proposition. Cf. Matt. 26:36ff.

(2) *We must clearly see that what is accomplished by prayer cannot be achieved merely by trying hard.* That is the common property of thinking and working; but in the case of prayer there must be a willingness to listen, to wait upon the Lord. Cf. Psa. 27:13,14; 37:3–5.

(3) *We must realize the fact that when we are alone we are not alone.* Cf. Matt. 6:6; John 8:29.

(4) *We must ourselves do something with ourselves.* We must make sure that our wills are lost in the will of God. See Luke 22:41,42; cf. Dan. 3:1ff.

# “O Thou That Hearest Prayer!”

*O thou that hearest prayer,  
Unto thee shall all flesh come.*

— Psa. 65:2.

**Introduction:** 1. When the faithful Christian, in whatever condition he may be, calls upon his heavenly Father in prayer, he may be sure that he will be heard; for God, as the psalmist affirms, hears prayer. He does not mock His children by teaching them to pray, and then refuse to hear them.

2. God Himself inspired the same confidence in Jeremiah, “while he was yet shut up in the court of the guard,” when He said, “Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not,”

3. Prayer is a privilege which belongs to every child of God, and we are taught to carry into it the faith which assures us that we can depend upon God for His blessings. We should, therefore, avoid haste in this sacred relationship, and banish all slavish fear from our hearts when we call upon Him in this “sweet hour of prayer.” Cf Heb. 4:14–16.

4. Prayer is a subject that is common to all parts of the Bible; for we read in Gen. 4:26 these significant words: “Then began men to call upon the name of Jehovah,” which, among other things, evidently included prayer. As one goes through the Bible and studies that which is said regarding prayer, he will be impressed with three outstanding facts regarding this subject — viz: The Lord’s people are encouraged,

## **I. To Continue in Prayer**

1. The essence of prayer is holding communion with God. It is altogether possible that many people say prayers without in reality praying; for, with their hearts far away from God, there can be no communion with Him. Like all other acceptable service to God, our hearts must be in our prayers, if we expect them to be heard. Cf. Matt. 15:8.

2: When Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, he exhorted them to continue "stedfastly in prayer." See Rom. 12:12. He did not merely tell them to pray; he took it for granted that they did that. His purpose was to make sure that they did not relax, or lose their first zeal in prayer. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 2:42.

3. But if one is to continue stedfastly in prayer, he must have a prayerful spirit, or, which is the same thing, his whole desire must be to please God. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:31. This desire for continual fellowship with the Lord will cause him to want to pray, and to make the daily effort to please the God to whom he prays. Cf. 1 John 1:6,7.

I met God in the morning,  
When my day was at its best;  
And His presence came like sunrise,  
Like a glory in my breast.  
All day long the Presence lingered,  
All day long He stayed with me;  
And we sailed in perfect calmness  
O'er a very troubled sea.  
Other ships were blown and battered,  
Other ships were sore distressed;  
But the winds that seemed to drive them  
Brought to us a peace and rest.  
Then I thought of other mornings,  
With a keen remorse of mind,

When I too had loosed the moorings,  
With the Presence left behind.  
So I think I know the secret,  
Learned from many a troubled way:  
You must seek Him in the morning  
If you want Him through the day!

— Ralph S. Cushman.

4. In summing up the contents of Paul's exhortation to the Romans, we should keep in mind these four things:

- (1) The habitual maintenance of a prayerful spirit.
- (2) The duty of embracing opportunities for prayer.
- (3) The obligation to prove the occasion of prayer.
- (4) Watchfulness as a part of steadfastness in prayer.

## **II. To Expect Answers to Prayer**

1. There is nothing more plainly taught in the Bible than that God will answer prayer. He has ordained the practice, and has made arrangements for both its presentation and acceptance. No one can believe in the wisdom and goodness of God and at the same time think that He meant for prayer to be an empty form, a meaningless ceremony, a heartless mockery.

2. He prompts, encourages, and stimulates prayer; and it is inconceivable that He would mock us by exciting desires which He never meant to satisfy. Such a thought not only is abhorrent; it impeaches God's integrity.

3. Not only does God teach and encourage His people to pray; He has solemnly pledged Himself to hear and answer their prayers, when they pray according to His will. His promise has been made, and He cannot lie or deny Himself. Cf. Phil. 4: 6,7,19; Heb. 13:5,6; Psalms 37:4,5.

## **III. To Expect Greater Things Than We Can Ask or Think**

1. Both the Old and the New Testaments emphasize the truthfulness of this statement. Cf. Jer. 33:3; Eph. 3:20,21.

2. This is to say that God is omnipotent – He knows no limitations; He is omnipresent – He inhabits the universe; He is omniscient – He sees all things from the beginning and knows what is best for every creature; and He is good and only good.

3. If one is willing to accept what the Bible says about God (and he cannot please Him if he does not, cf. Heb. 11:6); if he believes that God is good and only good, and that He is all-wise, ever-present, and has the power to bless beyond his ability to ask or think, how can he fail to trust Him, or be indifferent about his privilege of calling upon Him in prayer?

# When Prayer Is the Starting Point \*

*And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed.*  
— Mark 1:35.

**Introduction:** 1. The activity which we call prayer is, without a doubt, the very heart of religion. That which distinguishes a deeply religious man from all other people is the fact that he has a definite place in his life for prayer. This is to say that prayer is a definite part of his life. No finer example of this truth can be found than the one left us by Jesus.

2. It should be observed, however, that His prayers were not poured forth as an example only; they were, in addition to their example, the expression of the real feeling of His nature, and the means whereby He sought fresh supplies of strength to meet the ceaseless onslaughts of the powers of darkness. In praying, He was communing with His Father, while surrendering Himself unreservedly to all the emotions of divine love, both for the Father and for all mankind, so that He might better dedicate Himself to the work which He had undertaken.

3. There is something touchingly illustrative of our Saviour's humanity in the text now before us. He could have

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\* Or, The Importance of Prayer

prayed upon His couch; but He did not. Instead, He sought a quiet place where He could be alone with His heavenly Father. And if the Saviour needed to pray, how can those who profess to follow Him live without communion with God? To begin the day with the heavenly Father is the only sure method of setting one's self above all its events, and thus being in a position in which he may triumph over them with perfect mastery. Cf. Heb. 4:14–16. But in studying this lesson, let us consider some of the benefits which come from beginning the day with prayer.

### **I. It Enables Us to Form A Habit of Close and Intimate Union, Communion and Fellowship with God**

1. The law and force of habit are well understood; for all men live and act, more or less, under the influence of habit.

2. Those who neglect their duty, or engage in sinful practices, will soon find that they are drawn to these things by an invisible and almost irresistible influence.

3. They may see many examples to warn them of the dangers which confront them, and they may feel keenly the awful forebodings and warnings of a guilty and an aroused conscience; but, in spite of all these, the force of habit generally overcomes all their fears and feeble resolutions. Under its still-increasing power they continue their neglect, or sinful practices, until their characters have been largely developed; and then it is well-nigh impossible to change them. "An act often repeated hardens into a habit, and a habit long continued petrifies into character."

4. On the other hand, if one begins his life on the ascending scale, and forms the right kind of habits, he will soon find that he will have little difficulty in ascending still higher and higher on his way to eternal life and a home with God. These habits become helps and encouragements to him, and will cause him to hunger and thirst after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.



5. The habit of prayer, and especially of secret prayer, is altogether in harmony with this general law of habit and the growth and development of human character. In no other religious exercise is one brought so near to God; and in no other can he be so familiar with the Creator of his body and the Father and Preserver of his spirit. Furthermore, it is a law of nature that one forms attachment to and for those with whom he associates, and even becomes like them in his character; and since this is true, it follows that no other act of devotion is so favorable for the cultivation of godliness. Those, therefore, who have been most devoted to prayer, in its true sense, have always been the most pious and the happiest of men.

## **II. It Serves to Cultivate and Educate Our Spiritual Nature**

1. It is generally understood that all parts of our nature are developed and strengthened by exercise; and if that is a law of our human constitution, then what can be more serviceable in the way of spiritual culture than the devotion to the practice of prayer, and especially private prayer?

2. When one prays in secret there is no motive to try to deceive God, or to make a vain display of his person, dress, or good works. Instead, his mind turns upon itself; the conscience is awakened; and he sees himself in the light of God.

3. The practice of secret devotions brings one under the deep and solemn conviction that he is on holy ground, and that the eye of God is upon him; and with that feeling he is almost compelled to be humble, to repent of his sins, to forgive those who have sinned against him, to sympathize with the afflicted, to love and honor the Lord, and to endeavor to exercise all the powers of his being in harmony with the will of God. There is, therefore, a deep significance in the words of Jesus: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door,

pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee." (Matt. 6:6).

### **III. It Serves to Preserve Us from Many Evils**

1. It is impossible to live in this world without coming in contact with the influence of evil to some extent. Cf. John 17:15; I Cor. 5:9,10; Eph. 6:10ff.

2. The worst enemies that anyone has are his lusts and passions. Cf. James 1:13-16; I Pet. 2:1,2; Col. 3:5ff. However, these may be greatly weakened, and even subdued, through the influence of prayer. For example,

(1) How can a man cherish pride in his heart while he is sincerely communing with his heavenly Father? Cf. Isa. 66:2; Matt. 5:3-5.

(2) How can anyone cultivate a spirit of revenge while he is imploring the forgiveness of Him who said, "Vengeance belongeth unto Me; I will recompense, saith the Lord?"

(3) How can a devout Christian indulge in anger, wrath, malice, or any other of the works of the flesh, while he is seeking the help of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:26) whose fruits are always "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control?"

(4) How can one continue to neglect to do what he knows the Lord would be pleased to have him do, in order to do something that he wants to do, while sincerely praying, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth?" Cf. Acts 2:42; Heb. 2:3; James 2:10; 4:17.

3. Prayer, properly offered, always has a soothing influence upon the emotions. Its tendency is to allay the passions, promote virtues, and harmonize all the powers and faculties of the soul.

### **IV. It Secures to Us and for Us Much Positive Good by Fulfilling a Condition Upon Which God Has Promised to Bestow His Blessings**

1. Some have erroneously supposed that the influence of prayer is wholly subjective, or, at least, that it never extends beyond the narrow limits of our own earthly associations.

2. The Bible, however, plainly teaches that God hears the prayers of His faithful children, and that He is influenced for good by them. See Luke 18:1-8; Rom. 15:30-32; James 5:16-18.

3. Therefore, to ridicule or reject the idea that God is influenced by the prayers of His people is but to expose one's gross ignorance of the Bible and the moral government of God. If an earthly father finds that it is consistent with his dignity, with the regulation of his government, and for the best interest of his children to bestow his favors in answer to their petitions, then why may not the heavenly Father act on the same principle? See Matt. 7:7-11; James 4:2.

## **V. Prayer Is A Powerful and Divinely Appointed Means of Convicting, Sanctifying and Saving Others**

1. This is especially true of the family. The relation of the parent to a child is one of the nearest, dearest, and most interesting on earth; and for that reason it involves an influence which is peculiar to itself.

2. The example of the parent is to the child, during the most tender and impressible period of its existence, the standard of all that is right, noble, and magnanimous. The child's greatest concern is to imitate the parent, whether it be good or bad; and if the parent prays or neglects to pray, he may expect the child to follow him.

3. The parent, therefore, is responsible for the proper exercise of the influence of prayer over his child; and it will be a terrible thing for him to stand before the Judge of all the earth and have his child say to him, "You were responsible for bringing me into the world, but you never taught me to read and study the Bible and to pray unto the heavenly Father; and now it is too late."

4. But think of the joy that will come to the parent who can say to the great Judge, "Behold, I am here, Lord, and with me are all the children whom thou gavest me!" However, if this condition is to prevail, now is the time to make the preparation for it; and if there is anyone present who has never prayed with his children, let him begin today!

# Praying the Wrong Way

*For we know not how to pray as we ought.*

— Rom. 8:26.

**Introduction:** 1. Prayer is one of the highest summits in the Christian's experience; but like most summits it is viewed by most of us from afar. We see it; we enjoy looking at it; but the tremendous labor involved in getting to it, and the many dangers which beset the climbers, keep most of us from making a serious and sustained effort to reach the summit itself. However, those who have reached the top have been richly rewarded; and no one has regretted the effort he put forth in getting there.

2. There are several ways of describing prayer; but one that is easy to be understood is expressed in these words: "Prayer is direct, conscious, personal communion with God." And it goes without saying that so great a privilege as prayer is easily and widely misused, especially if we do not know what the Bible teaches on the subject.

3. Jesus Himself takes the lead in the persistent effort to curb the misuses of prayer. See Matt. 6:5,7,8. We should be encouraged, therefore, by so splendid an example of warning and consider some of the ways in which one may pray in the wrong way. In this study we shall see that some prayers are inadequate, some are questionable, and some are downright wrong. Not all of these are equally bad; some are decidedly worse than others; but all of them fall short of what the Bible says about prayer. But in studying this lesson, let us consider,

## I. Some Prayers Which Are Inadequate

1. By the expression "inadequate prayers" we mean prayers which are inadequate in theory. Those who offer such prayers do not themselves understand the scriptural meaning of prayer. It is for this reason that such prayers do not result in the release of the kind of spiritual strength that comes from vital, adequate praying.

2. Some examples of inadequate praying.

(1) "Work is prayer," or, "to work is to pray."

a. To work in connection with prayer is often very essential, but it lacks much of being the whole of prayer.

b. This view is inadequate because it does not do justice to the full meaning of prayer as direct, personal communion with God.

c. The most intense kind of concentration upon the most necessary kind of specific work known to man cannot take the place of direct, personal communion with the heavenly Father.

(2) Another inadequate conception of prayer is expressed in these words: "To get in touch with nature is to pray."

a. A walk in the woods, or by the seashore, may help deliver us from the artificial, man-made things which so often become a prison to us in this modern life; but such experiences fall far short of the direct, personal communion with God.

b. Sidney Lanier, in his poem, *A Ballad of Trees and the Master*,\* tells of one walk in the woods which went far beyond anything that is usually meant by those who hold this inadequate view of prayer:

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\* Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, and used by permission.

Into the woods my Master went,  
Clean forspent, forspent;  
Into the woods my Master came,  
Forspent with love and shame.  
But the olives were not blind to Him,  
The little gray leaves were kind to Him,  
The thorn tree had a mind to Him,  
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,  
And He was well content;  
Out of the woods my Master came,  
Content with death and shame.  
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,  
From under the trees they drew Him last,  
'Twas on a tree they slew Him — last,  
When out of the woods He came.

c. Unless "walks in the woods" prepare for communion with God, and, consequently, for the calvaries of the world, they have little connection with prayer, and will certainly fall far short of the discipline of prayer.

(3) A third inadequate conception of prayer is found in the words of a well-known hymn: "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or unexpressed."

a. The chief thing that is wrong with this view is that one can easily, and often does, desire things which are clearly in conflict with God's will.

b. Cf. Phil. 4:6,7; 1 John 5:14,15.

## **II. Some Prayers Which Are Questionable**

1. Prayers are in defiance of facts.

(1) Care must be exercised here; for not every so-called fact is in reality a fact.

(2) To pray for the restoration of an amputated foot, or for the restoration to life of a person who has died, is to fling oneself against facts which cannot be altered.

(3) If the claim is made that God has the power to do these things, and that he did perform such miracles in former days, let it be said in reply that no such miracles have been wrought since the close of the New Testament period; and there is not the slightest fact that even suggests that such will ever be done on earth among men again.

## 2. Prayers which are in defiance of reason.

(1) What is meant by reason grows out of the fact that we live in an orderly world, a world in which certain laws can be counted upon, a world in which we have learned that there is a fairly reliable relationship between cause and effect. Therefore, if some proposition fits in with this background of tested experience, we call it reasonable. If it does not, we demand thorough proof, or we call it unreasonable.

(2) To pray for God to stop a war, after men of the world have deliberately brought about the conditions which make for war (cf. James 4:1f), or to ask him to heal the sick, after the so-called faith cures, is to pray in defiance of reason.

## III. Some Prayers Which Are Positively Wrong

1. We are praying the wrong kind of prayers when we endeavor to reverse the proper relationship between God and man.

(1) Properly speaking, God is the Creator, man is the creature; God is the Redeemer, man is the redeemed. If this is true, as we glibly assert, then our prayers should respect and exemplify that relationship.

(2) But how often are we found praying as if God lives to provide us with what we want; so that, instead of seeking divine guidance, our obvious efforts are to obtain divine reinforcements.

(3) With this viewpoint in mind, people with conflicting interests can easily endeavor to make God a party to their disputes by asking him to give them what *they* want.



Cf. denominationalism, military victory, etc. (There is a vast difference in praying for the right to prevail, and for mere military victory.) If they would sincerely pray for God's will to be done in and through them, many of their differences would be removed.

2. Prayers which are "thing-centered" or "self-centered," rather than "God-centered" are wrong kind of prayers.

(1) People who pray in this spirit and fail to get what they want are sometimes heard to say that God failed them!

(2) Prayer is not an exercise whereby one informs God of what *he* wants. It is a discipline whereby one seeks to discover what *God* wants, and to conform himself to God's plan for him. Cf. Rom. 8:28. With this spirit guiding him, he does not want to ask for anything that would not be pleasing to God, or which would not be for his own best interest, as God sees it.

# Effective Praying

*The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.*  
— James 5:16b.

**Introduction:** 1. Prayer is one of the most effective forces in the Christian's entire experience. But like many of the other great privileges which God has provided for His people, it has come to us with ideas and practices attached to it which are foreign to the Lord's purpose regarding it. These extra ideas and practices not only were not ordained by the Lord, but they actually keep many of us from seeing the real meaning and power of prayer.

2. Preconceived ideas regarding any subject have a tendency to keep one from seeing the truth regarding that subject. The subject of prayer is no exception to this rule. It is very important, therefore, that we approach the question before us with an open mind, if we are to learn the truth regarding it.

3. One of the common mistakes that is made with reference to prayer is to regard it primarily, if not altogether, as a matter of petition or asking for something. Petition, indeed, is a vital part of prayer; but it lacks much of being all of it. There is much more to prayer than simply asking for something; and it is the prayer of this lesson to consider the subject from the standpoint of some of its more prominent aspects.

## I. Seeking Spiritual Companionship

1. Those who pray effectively must realize that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or

think;" and being both wise and good, He will not fail to hear our prayers, if we live before Him as we should. Cf. Eph. 3:20; Matt. 6:8; James 4:2,3.

2. The first thing, therefore, that should concern the Christian is to make sure that he is enjoying the fellowship and companionship of the Lord. See 1 John 1:5-7; Eph. 3:14-19; cf. Prov. 28:9.

3. As has already been pointed out, petition is a vital and necessary part of effective praying; but it should be clearly kept in mind that it is by no means all of prayer. No one can study the prayers of Jesus without seeing that He sought the companionship and fellowship of His Father in prayer, as much so as He endeavored to make known His petitions. Cf. Matt. 6:9-13; John 17:1ff.

4. Prayer is not to be regarded merely as "an emergency measure." That is not the way that we treat our friendships, even in this world. Furthermore, we do not ask our friends to do something for us every time we talk to them. In our conversations with them, and in our letters to them, we seek to cultivate and enjoy our fellowship with them. And, then, if a need or an emergency arises, all that we need to do is to let our friends know about it. If we are enjoying fellowship and companionship with them, they will be glad to do what they can.

5. Prayer is, in part at least, seeking the fellowship and companionship of our heavenly Father. Cf. Psalms 42:1,2; 143:1ff; Mark 1:35; 14:32ff. *Souls who pray in this manner are deeply rooted.*

Our gracious heavenly Father, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and it is not possible, therefore, for our souls to rest until they rest in Thee. Grant us, then, purity of heart and strength of purpose, so that nothing shall hinder us from knowing Thee and from doing Thy will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **II. Conforming to His Will**

1. People who pray with their minds on themselves, that is, on what *they* want God to do for them, have largely missed the point of effective praying. They have placed the emphasis on the wrong center.

2. God wants his children to make their requests known to him, but we should not overlook the fact that He already knows our needs and is more willing to bestow His blessings upon us than we are to ask for them. See Matt. 6:25–34; 7:7–11.

3. So, then, instead of prayer being a quick and easy way of getting for ourselves that which we would not otherwise get, it is an activity whereby we seek to avail ourselves of those spiritual resources which God has promised to all who sincerely endeavor to do His will. Cf. 1 John 3:22; 5:14,15.

4. With this aspect of prayer well in mind, it is easy to see that we are trying to bring ourselves into such a state or condition of obedience that will permit God to grant His blessings unto us.

5. We should earnestly seek to understand our needs, and we should not hesitate to make them known to God; but our greatest concern should be to bring ourselves into harmony with God's will. We should pray that His will be done in each of us, and in all things. Such prayers are God-centered, rather than self-centered.

## **III. Interior Relaxation and Serenity**

1. The chief idea to be stressed here is our attitude of mind, especially following our prayer. This interior relaxation and serenity is possible because of our confidence in the heavenly Father.

2. Two of the most impressive examples of this attitude to be found in all literature are furnished us by Jesus Himself and the apostle Paul. See Heb. 5:7 (Matt. 26:36ff); 2 Cor. 12:7–10.

3. Although neither of the specific petitions of these prayers was granted, it is a recorded fact that both petitioners received from God strength which enabled them to endure their suffering with perfect serenity and without a complaint. Cf. Deut. 33:27; Phil. 4:6,7.

4. There is no situation in life, with which a Christian can be confronted, that is too great for him, if he will put his trust in God. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13; James 1:2-8.

O God and heavenly Father, grant us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed, the courage to change that which can be changed, and the wisdom to tell the one from the other, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. — Reinhold Niebuhr.

# Against Hypocrisy in Prayer

*And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites.*

— Matt. 6:5a.

**Introduction:** 1. It is possible, because of ignorance or the wrong kind of teaching, for a person to pray the wrong kind of prayers; but if he is sincere and makes an honest effort to please the Lord, he will, sooner or later, come to understand the truth regarding prayer. Cf. John 7:17; Matt. 13:12. But if a person is insincere, even though he prays the right kind of prayers, so far as the words are concerned, he cannot be pleasing to God. Cf. Matt. 15:7,8; Mark 12:38–40.

2. Hypocrisy has been described as a profession, rather than a practice. The hypocrite professes to be what he is not. And while he is unacceptable in anything that he may do, it is particularly with reference to prayer that we are to consider him in this study. Let us begin, then, with

## **I. The Prayer of the Hypocrite, Matt. 6:5**

1. *The nature of this prayer.* It is a prayer of the lips and not of the heart. Cf. Matt. 15:7,8. Such a prayer furnishes a forceful exhibition of outward and formal righteousness, a righteousness which the Lord did not authorize and which is unacceptable to Him. See Rom. 10:1–3.

(1) The meaning of the term *hypocrite*. The words “hypocrite” and “hypocrisy” were used by Jesus Himself more than twenty times; and they constituted a most cutting expression of reproach. The word *hypocrite* formerly meant an actor or a stage-player. The actor in a play never represents himself, but always pretends to be some other

person; and it was for that reason that the term *hypocrite* came to mean a pretender; one who in actual life "assumes a character other than the real, with the design of gaining commendation." The hypocrites about whose prayers Jesus warned His disciples *pretended* to be giving glory to God by means of prayer; whereas, they *intended* to gain glory for themselves.

(2) These hypocrites (cf. Matt. 5:20) would make it a point to be "in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets" at the appointed times of prayer, that is, in public places where they would be seen by every one.

(3) The words of Jesus are not to be understood as prohibiting public prayer. The reference is not to public prayer, that is, prayer in which all who are in the assembly are expected to have a part; but to personal or private prayer in public places, that is, prayer in which no one else is expected to participate. The scope of this injunction may easily be seen when we consider,

2. *The purpose of the prayer under consideration.* It was to be seen of men, that is, those uttering the prayer expected to receive glory or praise from them. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was ostentatious; they wanted the praise of the people for their pretended devotions.

3. *The result of such praying,* Matt. 6:5c. They received what they sought after — namely, the glory of men.

## II. The Prayer of the Gentiles, Matt. 6:7

1. *The nature of this prayer.* It consisted in vain repetitions. Cf. 1 Kings 18:26; Eccclus. 7:14. "When ye pray, bable not moche." (Tyndale's Translation.)

(1) Bruce observes that "the Pagans thought that by endless repetitions and many words they would inform their gods as to their needs and weary them ('fatigare deos') into granting their requests."

(2) Does this prohibition of Jesus include all repetitions in prayer? Cf. John 17:14,16; Matt. 26:44.

2. *The purpose of this prayer*, Matt. 6:7b. Heathen people looked upon their gods as angry beings who needed to be *placated*, that is, to be brought from a state of hostile feeling to one of friendliness; and it was for that reason that they would bring sacrifices and utter "vain repetitions" in an effort to appease them. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees had become like the heathen in the matter of "much speaking." *Neither the hypocrite nor the heathen gives his heart to God; and that is what the Lord condemns.*

### III. The Prayer of the Christian, Matt. 6:6,8

#### 1. *The nature of this prayer.*

(1) It involves and springs from the secret devotions of the heart. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to gain the *eye of men*; while Christians seek to gain the *ear of God*. Prayer has been described as the sacred and reverent conversation of the soul with God. The singular number in verse 6 indicates that the prayer under consideration is a *personal* or *private* prayer.

(2) It arises from and is motivated by trust in God as our Father. Jesus, more than all others, emphasizes the Father-relation of God. The heavenly Father is omniscient; and for that reason vain repetitions are out of place when addressing Him.

2. *The purpose of this prayer.* The purpose of prayer, as authorized by Jesus, is to glorify God; and it is therefore much broader in its scope than the prayers of the hypocrites and the Gentiles. It may, and often does, consist in the following particulars:

(1) *Praise to God.* This is the worshipper's response to his recognition of the character and dignity of God.

(2) *Thanksgiving to God.* The giving of thanks, not only for the blessings of life, but also for the privilege of coming to God in prayer.



(3) *Confession to God*. That is, the confession of our sins to Him.

(4) *Petition to God*. That is, the requests which the worshipper makes to Him for His blessings. From these considerations it is plain to see that prayer is not altogether asking God for something.

3. *The result of this prayer*, Matt. 6:6b. The scribes and Pharisees receive their reward from men, while Christians receive theirs from God.

# The Testing Ground of Prayer

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*

— I Thess. 5:21.

**Introduction:** 1. It is doubtful if there is anything in popular religion today that is less understood than prayer. And it is certain that nothing is more useless and dangerous in its purpose and practice than many of the prevalent ideas of prayer. Many people have no hesitancy in approaching God in what they call prayer while their lives are clearly out of harmony with His will; and they will call upon Him for things which He positively said that He would not grant under those conditions.

2. On the other hand, prayer rightly understood and practiced is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, forces in the world today. It is a spiritual force that releases radiance and power. So great is the influence of effective praying that some people think that miracles are performed. However, miracles have long since ceased from the earth; and that which seems so strange to many is but the result of doing that which God has taught regarding prayer. Cf. James 5:16b–18. But in studying this lesson, let us consider,

## **I. The Right Attitude Regarding Prayer**

1. As long as people hold to the idea that prayer is mainly asking God for something which they themselves want, they are going to be disappointed in the results which follow their prayers. Furthermore, their souls will be damaged to the extent that, instead of praying without ceasing,

they will find themselves depending less and less upon prayer.

2. Before one can pray intelligently and scripturally he must be taught something of the truth regarding God. He must know something of who and what God is, and what He has promised to do with reference to prayer. But when one affirms in prayer, as he should, the truth regarding God's wisdom, goodness, bounty, etc., he certainly does not manifest trust in Him, which he must do if he expects to have his prayers heard, if he goes on worrying and otherwise acting as if God did not exist. Many of our prayers are not answered because our reliance on God is counterbalanced by our fear and unbelief.

3. The truth is that many religious people are afraid to say in their prayers, "Thy will be done;" and many who do use the expression have no intention of conforming to the Lord's will, unless it suits them. They are too anxious for their own selfish will to be done, especially in matters which involve their affairs. Such people are afraid that something they do not want will be done. They seem to think that they know better what they want and what is best for them than all the wisdom of the Supreme Intelligence.

4. If we could learn, first of all, to bend our efforts towards the divine order, keep ourselves in touch with the desires of God, and regard ourselves as instruments for the carrying out of His plans, we would find that our prayer-life would be much more satisfactory. Cf. Matt. 6:33; Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 1:12.

5. When we pray, unless we have become calloused, we find out how sincere and truthful we are. These two qualities — sincerity within and truthfulness without — are essential; for without them there can be no religion worthy of the name. It is very necessary, therefore, that we make a careful test of our prayer-life. It is the will of God that His children pray unto Him; and every prayer in accordance

with His will is heard. See Matt. 7:7-11; Phil. 4:6,7; Heb. 5:7; 2 Cor. 12:7-10. This brings us to a consideration of

## **II. The Conditions of Acceptable Prayer**

1. It must be offered in faith, Matt. 21:22. In order to do this,

(1) One must believe what God says about prayer. Cf. Rom. 10:17.

(2) He must ask for something which He has promised to give.

(3) He must ask according to the conditions which He has named. For example, bread, Matt. 6:11; Gen. 3:19; salvation, Rom. 1:16,17; Mark 16:15,16.

2. It must be prompted by the right motive, James 4:3; cf. 5:16b-18; 1 Kings 18:36,37.

3. It must be offered according to the will of God, 1 John 3:22; 5:14,15.

4. The worshipper must be in the right condition spiritually, John 15:7.

5. It must be offered in the name of Christ, that is, prompted by the mind of Christ and in reliance on the bond which unites us to him (Thayer), John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:24. Cf. an officer, "In the name of the law." Not only must we meet these conditions, if we would have our prayers heard; we must also avoid all hindrances to prayer. In fact, we cannot meet the conditions unless we avoid the hindrances. This lesson, therefore, would not be complete without a study of

## **III. Hindrances to Acceptable Prayer**

1. Allowing sin to remain in the heart, Psalms 66:18; Isaiah 59:1,2.

2. Refusing to hear and obey God's law, Proverbs 28:9. 1-5; 2 Thess. 2:10-12.

5. Maintaining a wrong attitude toward one's companion, 1 Peter 3:7.

6. Harboring a grudge, Matt. 6:14,15.
7. Stopping one's ears to the cry of the poor, Prov. 21:13; cf. 1 John 3:17.
8. Doubting whether God will answer, James 1:5–8.

# Is Standing for Prayer Acceptable to God?

*And whensoever ye stand praying.* — Mark 11:25.

**Introduction:** 1. The question of the posture to the body in prayer has long been an issue among the Lord's people. Some feel that kneeling is the only proper attitude to assume, while others hold that standing is permissible along with kneeling. Still others, with less concern about the matter, perhaps, contend that it makes little difference about the posture of the body, so long as the heart is right. 2. But as long as honest brethren are not agreed on the subject, everyone should be willing to give the matter his earnest consideration in the light of what God has said on the question. If one is right in his views regarding the subject, then he may help someone else see the truth; but if he is not right, it may be that he himself will see the light. As we begin the study, then, let us ask,

## **I. Is the Posture of the Body an Integral Part of Prayer?**

1. The answer to this question seems to be in the negative, since there is no scriptural authority for saying that it is.

2. However, one is not to conclude from this that it makes no difference about the bodily posture; for the Bible does teach something regarding this subject.

3. Prayer is a vital part of the Christian's work and worship; and inasmuch as prayer is impossible without bodily posture, it follows, therefore, that the subject has an essential connection with prayer.

4. It is one thing to say that there is *an essential connection* between the posture of the body and prayer; but for one to affirm that the posture of the body and prayer are *integral parts of a whole* is another proposition.

## **II. The Question Stated**

1. It is not the purpose of this study to call in question or minimize the kneeling position; for the Scriptures clearly teach that it was a common practice in Bible times, and one that was entirely acceptable to the Lord.

2. The same thing may be said of the prostrate position.

3. The question that should be settled here is, "Do the Scriptures authorize or permit the standing posture in prayer?"

## **III. Public versus Private Prayers**

1. There are those who profess to see a difference between public and private prayers, as it respects the question of bodily posture.

2. This apparent difference, however, is not based primarily (by those who claim that there is a difference) on anything the Scriptures teach on the subject; but, seemingly, on the fact that no thoughtful person would contend that a righteous man could not offer an acceptable prayer at any place and under any condition.

3. But if one person can pray to God acceptably in any position, what would hinder three or more people united in prayer from doing the same thing?

4. What is there about a public prayer that makes a bodily posture unacceptable, which is acceptable in private prayer?

## **IV. Do the Scriptures Authorize or Permit Standing for Prayer?**

1. The Lord's statement in Mark 11:25 seems to indicate that they do. J. W. McGarvey, in commenting on this pas-

sage, says, "This expression shows that it was usual for the disciples to pray standing. Kneeling and prostration were and are more devout postures, and should be preferred when circumstances do not forbid; but standing is here recognized by Jesus as a suitable posture, and it is therefore not to be despised. Whether a worshipping assembly should habitually stand or kneel must be determined by each for itself in the light of surrounding circumstances; but it should be remembered, that while standing and kneeling are both marks of respect in the presence of a superior, sitting is not; and consequently, sitting in prayer betrays a want of reverence." (*The New Testament Commentary, Vol. I – Matthew and Mark*, p. 339.)

2. The original word for "stand" in the passage just cited is *steko*.

(1) This Greek term occurs twelve times in the New Testament; and, according to Moulton and Geden (*A Concordance to the Greek Testament*), the word was not in classical usage prior to the Christian era. This fact is further confirmed by the omission of the word from the great classical work of Liddell and Scott. (*A Greek-English Lexicon*).

(2) Thayer (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*) lists and defines its New Testament usage as follows:

- a. *To stand*, Mark 3:31; 11:25; John 1:26; Rev. 12:4.
- b. *To stand firm, to persist, persevere*:
  - (a) To persevere in godliness and recitude, 2 Thess. 2:15.
  - (b) In one's fellowship with the Lord, Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8.
  - (c) In the faith, 1 Cor. 16:13.
  - (d) In one spirit, Phil. 1:27.
- c. *To keep one's standing, i.e., maintain his allegiance to freedom*, Gal. 5:1.
- d. *To stand erect, i.e., not to sin*, Rom. 14:4.



e. John 8:44, undefined by Thayer, but its meaning here is clear.

(3) It is plain, therefore, from these scriptural usages that the word should be understood in its ordinary meaning "to stand," except when otherwise indicated by the context. Cf. 1 Kings 8:22-54.

a. No one would have thought that Solomon was on his knees, since the statement was that he "stood before the altar of Jehovah," if the inspired writer had not plainly said that he was.

b. But even with that circumstance before us, there is no indication that we are to interpret all other passages in which the word "stand" occurs in the light of what was said about Solomon. Hedge, in setting forth "rules of interpretation," says, "Words, which admit of different senses, should be taken in their most common and obvious meaning, unless such a construction lead to absurd consequences, or be inconsistent with the known intention of the writer." (*Elements of Logick*, p. 165.)

3. Scriptural examples of people who stood for prayer:

- (1) Abraham, Gen. 18:22ff.
- (2) Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:9,10,26.
- (3) David, 2 Sam. 15:31,32.
- (4) Nehemiah, Neh. 2:1-4.
- (5) The publican, Luke 18:13,14.

## V. Some Objections Considered

1. *Since kneeling for prayer is unquestionably safe, why not cling to that practice alone?* Answer: Inasmuch as God has indicated at least two other acceptable postures of the body, prostration and standing, what right has anyone to say that they are not to be employed too? *We must be careful not to make a law where God has not made one.*

2. *If the heart is right, what difference does it make what posture of the body one assumes?* Answer: The worshipper must come to God in prayer in a reverent manner;

and since there are postures of the body which are not regarded as indicative of reverence, even by men (sitting, for example), it follows that the safe thing for one to do is to assume a bodily posture in prayer which he knows that God approves.

3. *Is it not true that practically all the examples of prayer, especially in the New Testament, are characterized by kneeling?* Answer: Yes, that is true. It is also true that every case of obedience to the gospel is characterized by baptism. Now suppose that some one could produce a passage of Scripture in which Jesus plainly says that one can obey the gospel without being baptized, would any thoughtful person contend that such obedience would be impossible, since every example is characterized by baptism? Of course, no such statement can be found with reference to baptism and obedience to the gospel. But in the matter of standing for prayer the situation is different, for we have a plain statement from Jesus on the subject in Mark 11:25; and if *every* example of praying is characterized by kneeling that fact does not destroy the force of a plain statement by the Lord.

4. *Is it not reasonable to suppose that Jesus was emphasizing the necessity of forgiving an offense when one prays, rather than indicating a bodily posture in prayer?* Answer: There is nothing in the text or the context to warrant such a conclusion. But suppose that there is something to indicate that such a supposition is reasonable, it still remains true that Jesus brought to the attention of his hearers a bodily posture in prayer which He considered acceptable; or else he introduced an idea which is out of harmony with all his teaching on the subject, and employed a word in doing so which cannot be taken in its ordinary meaning, with nothing in the context to indicate what he meant by the word. Paul was not discussing *baptism*, as such, in Rom. 6:3,4, that is, that was not the primary subject he was discussing; but he used an expression, "buried there-

fore with Him through baptism," *which very clearly indicates the particular act performed in baptism.*

5. *Doesn't the practice of standing for prayer tend to create a spirit which indicates a lack of humility with reference to such matters?* Answer: Possibly so, at least with some people; but the trouble does not lie in the practice of something which God disapproves, but rather in the lack of teaching on the subject under consideration. If people are properly taught with reference to the question of the posture of the body in prayer, they will be reverent when they stand for prayer. Cf. the argument that is sometimes made to the effect that the frequency of eating the Lord's supper, that is, its weekly observance, has a tendency to destroy its sacredness. Is it the frequency of such eating, or the lack of teaching on the subject, that brings about such an attitude in the minds of some people?

**Conclusion:** This lesson is not intended to advocate that people stand for prayer to the exclusion of other bodily postures which are approved in the Scriptures, or even to stand at all for prayer; but its purpose is to show that standing is an *acceptable posture* in the sight of the Lord; and to endeavor to point out to those who object to standing for prayer that they are going beyond that which is written in their attitude toward this subject. Cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9.

# The Shut Door

*But thou, when thou prayest enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.*  
— Matt. 6:6.

**Introduction:** 1. The world is always curious about the private lives of notable people. Such an attitude is the foundation of gossip; as well as the secret of the appeal of certain kinds of literature and journalism. It is likewise the spice of history. Every community knows that a man's real life is a secret thing; and it is always trying to find out something about it.

2. The most important part of a man's life is that which is inward and spiritual; and since acceptable prayer is a vital part of that life, it follows that the *inner chamber* and the *shut door* should have a very great emphasis in every man's experience as a Christian.

3. We should, however, in thinking of the inner chamber and the shut door, be careful not to think of them too literally. There is no definite indication that Christ meant to localize the room of which he spoke. Jesus often prayed on a mountain top, in a garden, or in some other secluded spot where he could be alone with God. Any place, therefore, of physical or mental retirement, or both, where the Christian, unseen and unheard, can pour out his soul to the heavenly Father, may be regarded as his inner chamber, separated from the rest of the world by the closed door. But in studying this lesson, let us ask,

## **I. Why Is the Shut Door Necessary?**

1. There must be a spiritual communion between God and those who worship Him (John 4:24); and since neither God nor His people are of the world (John 17:14–16), it follows that this communion must be separate and apart from the world.

2. The lack of a suitable place is not the only thing that makes communion with God difficult. The haste and disconnectedness of our modern life, together with the pressure of its cares and the thrust of its many duties, are constantly calling us away from Him.

(1) The world we live in is continually growing larger and more complicated. Its voices through the press and over the radio fill our ears all the day long.

(2) Life amid such surroundings has lost peace and stability for many of us, to say nothing of our touch with God; and since everything depends upon our daily communion with Him, our greatest need is solitude — time to be alone with our heavenly Father.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;

Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.

Make friends of God's children; help those who are weak;

Forgetting in nothing His blessings to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;

Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.

By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;

Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;

And run not before Him, whatever betide;

In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord;

And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul;

Each tho't and each motive beneath His control;

Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,

Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

— W. D. Longstaff.

3. It is in this quietness behind the shut door that our souls are nourished. It is in such quietness that God speaks to us, if only we will listen patiently and honestly to that which He says.

4. This hour of quietness, of opening up our minds and hearts to the promised help and guidance of God, should be regular and systematic. We should set aside a time for prayer each day, and allow nothing to interfere with that practice, in so far as it is possible with us. Cf. *Psa.* 55:16, 17; *Dan.* 6:10; *Acts* 10:30.

## **II. Some Blessings Behind the Shut Door**

1. We become aware of the value of some things which in the rush of life we frequently overlook. For example:

(1) Love for each other. Cf. *John* 13:34,35; *1 John* 4:20,21.

(2) The treasure of friendship. Cf. *Damon and Pythias*; *Jonathon and David*.

(3) The gift of health. Cf. *3 John* 2.

(4) The beauty of the earth and that which surrounds it. See *Psa.* 19:1.\*

(5) Greater love and appreciation for God. Cf. *Phil.* 4:6,7; *Heb.* 13:5,6.

2. We are able to see things in their true proportions. Many of the fears and cares that darken life do so because we see them out of their setting.

(1) We brood over small misfortunes or trifling disappointments until they darken the whole sky.

(2) We vex ourselves about things which are not of

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\* A man was tramping across a moor when he met a botanist peering through a microscope into the heart of a little moorland flower. The botanist handed over the microscope and bade him look. As he gazed within and saw for the first time the delicate beauty of the flower, his eyes filled with tears. "To think," he said, "that I have trampled down so many of these!"

— Edward Hastings.

real importance in the long range view of life and its divine meaning. Cf. Rom. 8:28.

(3) Many of the shadows would pass away if we would stop, look them squarely in the face, and ask a few questions — for example,

a. Is this for which we are striving really worthwhile? Cf. 2 Cor. 4:18; Phil. 3:7–11.

b. Does the loss over which we are grieving greatly matter?

3. Most of all, when we have shut the door, God has the opportunity of becoming real to us, and of making us certain of His love, comfort, and care for us.

(1) It is within the soul, and not by logical reasoning, that He makes Himself known to us. Cf. 2 Tim. 1:12.

(2) Arguments and discussions often confuse us; but to go where God is and hold communion with Him brings a joy and satisfaction which the world can never take away. Cf. Phil. 4:6,7.

### III. Hindrances to the Shut Door

1. It is not always easy to shut the door; for silence can be invaded by cares that absorb and the thrust of many duties. Cf. Luke 8:14; 10:38–42.

2. The heart that was meant for a temple may become a thoroughfare for the traffic of business. *That is the real meaning of "profane."* Cf. Matt. 21:12,13; Acts 24:6; Heb. 12:16.

3. It may take time and patience to shut the world out, to become quiet enough to hold communion with God.\*

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\* We are told that there are nerves in the retina of the eye which become active only in the twilight. But it takes time for them to come into play. We have to wait in the darkness till the light out of which we have come has ceased to dazzle. It is the same with the inner eye. We must be patient. But the mood in which God can speak to us does not come by trying to empty the mind of everything from without. It comes by thinking about God, His care, His grace, His willingness to guide and help. As we think on Him, bit by bit the outside world relaxes its grip. And through our hearts, like a gentle tide, God's peace comes flooding in.

— Ibid.

# Learning to Pray

*And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.*  
— Luke 11:1.

**Introduction:** 1. Some one has said that prayer is the most talked about and the least used force in the world. But in spite of this attitude toward prayer, Tennyson was probably right when he wrote these exquisite lines:

More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

2. Prayer, in its truest sense, is one of the highest attainments possible to man; but before one can reach anything like perfection in his prayer-life he must learn both the meaning and the art of praying.

3. The earnest disciple, however, will not get very far along the road toward perfection in prayer before he learns that many difficulties are in the way. Therefore, in beginning this study, let us consider,

## **I. Some Obstacles in the Way of Prayer**

1. No one will ever throw himself upon God, and call upon Him as his heavenly Father, who first of all tries to reason himself into a belief that there *is* a God. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:21; Heb. 11:6.



2. Belief in and reliance upon a reign of law keeps people from praying unto God.

(1) God, someone has said, does not have to come out every morning and say to the sun, "Get up, and shine again today." Has He not, therefore, placed all things under law? If a blessing is received, it must come through the regular channel of law, so we are told.

(2) The laws of God in all things must, indeed, be recognized; but it must be remembered that prayer does not belong to law in the realm of physics, but to law in the realm of personal relations. Cf. laws in the realm of nature, providence, etc.

(3) It is believed that all of God's works may be classified under three general headings — viz: miraculous, natural, and providential.

a. A miracle may be defined as an effect produced by a special act of God's will, without conforming to any law.

b. A work of nature is an effect produced without a special act of God's will, being simply the result of His natural laws.

c. The work of providence is an effect produced by a special act of God's will through the use of natural means.

(4) The Bible teaches that the work that was intended to be done by miracles has been accomplished, and that no miracles are performed today, so far as we know, or have any record (see Mark 16:19,20; Heb. 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-16); but, in the absence of miracles, God has all the forces of nature and all the realms of both nature and providence in which to work; and there is no prayer which a child of God can offer, in accordance with the conditions named in the Scriptures, which God cannot answer, either through nature or through providence. Cf. Heb. 4:14-16; Psalms 37:4-9.

3. We are frequently unwilling to pay the price of prayer.

(1) No one can pray to be made a loving and a lovable character and at the same time continue to hate his brother. Cf. 1 John 4:20,21.

(2) It is one thing to pray, but quite another to accept the consequence of our prayer. No one can attempt to please God and at the same time follow the low ideals of the generation in which he lives, or be contented with his own state of indolence and indifference toward the life required by Jesus. Cf. Luke 17:10; James 2:10; 4:17.

## **II. Conditions Necessary to a Successful Prayer-Life**

1. If one would learn to pray, he must travel the way of love; for, as one has described it, love is the wave length by which human prayer travels to the heart of God.

(1) There is an instrument by which mariners can see the sun, even though it is hidden by clouds of fog or snow.

(2) Love to the Christian is a similar device for feeling the presence of God, even when clouds and darkness seem to hide the face of God from him.

2. He must likewise travel the way of solitariness. This was emphasized in the lesson on *The Shut Door*.

(1) But, let it be remembered, it is the *use* which one makes of his solitariness, and not simply the state of being solitary, that counts before God.

(2) The one who shuts the door to the outer world must enter into the spirit of his environment, if he is to profit by the experience.

3. There must be the desire to be taught how to pray.

(1) The disciples requested Jesus to teach them; but their desire to learn was evidently the result of what they had seen in the life of Jesus — viz., an unbroken fellowship with God.

(2) The life of Christ among them had created the desire; and now He gladly responds to their request that He teach them how to pray. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 2:42.

### III. The Process at Work

1. Before any one can reach anything like perfection in his prayer-life, he must pass through several successive stages along the way. To illustrate: Contrast the prayers of the God and New Testaments — e.g., Samson's, Judg. 16:28-30; Stephen's, Acts 7:59,60.

2. There appears to be five distinct stages in reaching a perfect prayer-life. They are,

(1) Saying a prayer.

a. This may be, and frequently is, purely mechanical. It is the repetition of words and phrases, without much thought as to their meaning. Little children say prayers:

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take.  
This I ask in Jesus' name.

b. It should be observed here that a mistake is often made with reference to the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples. See Matt. 6:9-13. That prayer was never intended for mere repetition. "After this *manner* therefore pray ye."

(2) Praying a prayer.

a. Here the worshipper passes from mere repetition to a conscious communion with God. This is like passing from manipulating a play-piano to making music through the mastery of the keyboard.

b. At this stage we have extemporary prayer; and if a form is repeated, there is a consciousness as to its meaning.

(3) Praying for self.

a. At this point the worshipper recognizes his personal needs; but his prayers are characterized almost wholly by petition, and selfish petition at that.

b. Some one has said that what we ask God for mirrors our inner life. It is therefore possible to mark the transformation of character by the difference in the character and objects of our prayers.

c. Prayers belonging to this stage are "give me prayers," rather than "make me prayers." Cf. the requests and prayers of the prodigal son as he went out and come in, Luke 15:12,18,19,21; and those of Jacob on similar occasions, Gen. 28:20f; 32:9f. From these and other like experiences, it may be observed that human nature is about the same in all ages.

#### **(4) Praying for others.**

a. Here the prayer-life assumes a nobler spirit. It deepens and widens like the channel of a river as it approaches the ocean. This is Christ-like. Cf. 1 Sam. 12:23.

b. It is difficult to over-estimate the place and power of intercessory prayer. Preachers, children, the sick, those fighting great temptations, and many others are greatly benefitted by it. Cf. Eph. 6:18-20; 2 Thess. 3:1,2; Phile. 22.

#### **(5) Praying in the Spirit.**

a. Here the spirit of prayer permeates the whole being: "Pray without ceasing." Prayer becomes more of an atmosphere than an act, more of an attitude than simply a deed, more of a spirit than merely doing something.

b. It is holding one's self in tune with God, and delighting to do so. It is then that the Spirit can take our groanings which we cannot utter and interpret them so as to make them into intercessions for us. See Rom. 8:26,27.

c. It is living all the time in this attitude of spiritual consonance with God that constitutes the highest degree of spiritual excellence of which human beings are capable.

d. When one reaches this point he has really learned how to pray; and he enjoys an unbroken fellowship with God. Cf. 1 John 1:6,7. It is then much easier for him

to live as he should; for he is constantly seeking to please God and thereby continue his fellowship with him. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:9.

3. Does any one wonder why the disciples, who daily observed the life of Jesus, asked him to teach them to pray? If he needed to pray, and if he found a blessing in the practice, how much more did they! Every child of God should enter this school of prayer; and it should make no difference if his beginning in the prayer-life is humble and feeble.

# The Model Prayer

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

— Matt. 6:9–13.

**Introduction:** 1. If Matt. 6:9–13 and Luke 11:1–4 refer to the same prayer, then Jesus evidently gave this model prayer in response to a request from his disciples; but if they are not the same prayer, the language of the two occasions must have been spoken under similar circumstances.

2. As was pointed out in a previous lesson, prayer is a vital part of every Christian's life; but one must be taught how to pray before he can enter into the spirit and service of acceptable prayer; and it was for this reason that Jesus gave this model prayer.

3. The few brief sentences of this prayer have a hold upon mankind which few other forms of words have. These words are used in some ways by myriads of people every day. But in studying this lesson, let us consider some of the particulars in which it is a model prayer.

## **I. It Is a Model With Reference to Brevity and Scope**

1. The entire prayer, in the American Standard Version of the New Testament, contains only fifty-five words; but they embrace a condensed statement of the Lord's chief ideas about God and men, arranged in comprehensive sen-

tences, the significance of which was already well understood by His followers.

2. An analysis of the prayer reveals a well-considered literary structure of three parts – viz:

(1) The address.

(2) A group of petitions pertaining to God.

(3) A group of petitions pertaining to those offering the prayer.

3. Not only is this prayer both brief and comprehensive; but the very words in which it is expressed cover a wide range of human needs, as well as the relationship between God and man.

## **II. It Is a Model With Reference to Simplicity and Directness**

1. Instead of making the prayer such as would appeal especially to the cultured and highly educated, it is one that everybody can easily understand. Cf. Matt. 11:25ff.

(1) This simplicity, however, does not indicate shallowness; for long usage of the prayer has demonstrated that new stores of richness in its meaning are continually coming to light.

(2) While the context seems to suggest that Jesus meant this prayer for individual and private use; it is, nevertheless, a broadly human, or universal prayer, which meets the needs of the race; and yet it is as individual as each one could possibly desire for his own private use.

2. Its directness is seen in the fact that the requests which are made are distinct and definite – each petition being a request for a distinct and definite object.

(1) The ideal prayer is that which makes one's request known to God with the same frankness and directness with which a child makes known his wants to his parents.

(2) Compare the following scriptures: Mark 10:15; Phil. 4:6,7.

3. The simplicity and directness of this prayer are fur-

ther seen in the character of the words used — words which retain their meaning in spite of the influence of time and translation into other languages.

(1) This is not true of all words; for some have dissimilar meanings at different times in history, in different localities, and when translated into different languages. Cf. despot, carp, resent, prevent, and idiot. See an unabridged dictionary of the English language, and the chapter on "The Change of Meaning in the History of Words" in *Instrumental Music in the Worship*, by M. C. Kurfees, Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, Tennessee.

(2) But in the prayer which Christ taught his disciples, the important words and sentences were chosen in such a way as to preserve their meaning, irrespective of the influence of time, place, and translation into other languages. Cf. Father, heaven, earth, kingdom, will, bread, forgive, and evil.

### **III. It Is a Model With Reference to Order**

1. It teaches us that in all true prayer God's glory must come first.

2. Before a word was said about personal needs, Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God's name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Cf. James 4:3.

3. It is after this manner that the Lord's people are to pray always: first, God's glory; and then our personal needs. This is one of the hardest lessons we have to learn; and one of life's hardest tasks has been accomplished when we have learned to prefer God's will to our own, and when we sincerely seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Cf. Matt. 6:33; 16:24f; Psalms 137:5,6.

### **IV. It Is a Model With Reference to Spirit**

1. The power of prayer does not depend so much upon



the words we use, as upon the spirit in which we offer it. Cf. Matt. 8:13; John 4:24.\*

2. The spirit which gives prayer its efficacy and power is the spirit of childlike confidence and trust. Cf. Heb. 11:6; Mark 10:15.

3. The first two words of this model prayer indicate the spirit of the petitioners. They imply that we come to God as His children, believing that He is more willing and ready to give good things to us, than we are to give good things to our children. Cf. Matt. 7:7-11; Phil. 4:6,7; Heb. 13:5,6.

4. It is after this manner that we are always to pray; and the measure of our trust in God will be the measure of our power in prayer.

5. It was because of his perfect faith that the prayers of Jesus were always prevailing prayers. He called God *Father*; and he honored that Fatherhood by placing an absolute and utter trust in Him. "If only Christ's spirit of loving

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\* Prayer is more an atmosphere than an act, more an *attitude* than a deed, more a spirit than a doing something .... It is living all the time in this attitude of spiritual consonance with God that constitutes the highest degree of spiritual excellence of which human beings are capable. It is to be feared that many so-called "Christians" know very little about such seasons of spiritual refreshing coming from the presence of the Lord. Such exercise in prayer is neither distasteful nor onerous to the one engaging in it. It is really the most happy experience of a human soul that has been trained in it. It is this spirit of prayer or spiritual association with God that plumes our spiritual pinions for the grandest flights possible for human beings into the limitless realms of God's own Spirit and being; and the more it is indulged in, the sweeter and more helpful it becomes. Does prayer mean this to you? And are you thus saying to your innermost self:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unending sea!

— Hall L. Calhoun.

confidence in God were breathed into our prayers, how irresistible they would be!" Cf. James 5:16–18.

## **V. Was This Prayer Intended for Present-Day Christians?**

1. As has already been indicated, Jesus never meant for this model prayer to be bound upon any one as a set form; although a careful analysis of it will reveal that it comprehends about all that a person need to say.

2. There are two objections that are usually registered by those who feel that the prayer was not meant for people today – viz:

(1) *The kingdom has already come; and no one, of course, can now employ that petition in the sense in which Jesus used it.* There does not seem to be anything about the prayer, or the context, that limits the Lord's meaning to the kingdom's coming on the first Pentecost after His ascension. It certainly included the establishment of the kingdom then; but there are reasons for believing that the expression embraced a petition that the kingdom might come to all people everywhere as long as time shall last; so that every person may have a chance to enter into it. It would, indeed, be strange to have just one petition in this prayer limited to a particular period of time!

(2) *All prayer today must be in the name of Christ, a thing that is not true of the prayer now under consideration.* Cf. John 16:24. Prayers were not offered in the name of Christ during his stay on the earth; but since he plainly taught his disciples to pray in his name after his reign in heaven began, there is no reason for saying that the expression, "in the name of Christ," with all that it signifies, may not be added to the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Cf. John 14:1–4; 16:23,26.

3. "This prayer is wonderful in its *brevity, comprehensiveness, ideality, and fitness.* Like all of Jesus' teachings, it is perfect. Some people would like to set it aside because it sets a standard of personal conduct higher than they like

to accept. The constant hallowing of God's name, the doing of God's will here on earth as it is done in heaven, the asking for forgiveness of our sins against God only when we have forgiven those who have sinned against us, the asking for merely daily needs to be supplied, are out of harmony with the shameful profanation of God's name all too commonly heard. The doing of God's will here and now leaves no room for our own wills to lead us. The harsh and unforgiving spirit manifested by some even professing Christians is severely condemned, as is the shameless greed of some who seem to want everything in sight rather than daily bread. God help us all to strive to live up to this prayer." — Ibid.

# The Beginning Point

*Our Father who art in heaven. — Matt. 6:9.*

**Introduction:** 1. All acceptable prayer must begin with a firm belief in God. Cf. Heb. 11:6. This faith involves belief in the existence of God as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and belief in His faithfulness in rewarding all who seek after Him. These two elements of faith may also be called “conviction” and “confidence” — conviction that there is a God and confidence that He will do what is right for those who obey Him. He could not be a God of justice and do otherwise. Cf. Heb. 6:10; 10:23.

2. Some one has said that there are three stages in the growth and development of the human soul. The first stage is at birth when it looks with wise and startled eyes upon the big and busy world about it. The next stage is when the soul becomes conscious of itself as a distinct person, separate from others, and with life and duties all its own. The third stage is when it becomes aware of God as the One with whom it really has to do in the adventure of life. To these a fourth has been added — viz., when the soul passes from the idea of God as a Power or Ruler, to the conception of Him as a Father.

3. The Fatherhood of God is almost wholly a New Testament revelation. Only a very little is said on this subject in the Old Testament (see Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4,19; 31:9, American Standard Version), and that, as a rule, refers to Him as the Father of a nation; but in the New Testament He is revealed as the Father of the individual believer. Cf. Rom. 8:14–17. Therefore, in studying this lesson, let us begin by considering,

## I. The Fatherhood of God

1. There are certain rights and privileges which belong to fatherhood that must be carefully studied, if we are to get the full force of the opening words of the prayer now before us. These prerogatives include,

### (1) The author of life.

a. Every human being who lives on the earth today owes his life to his father before him; and when the history of the human race is traced back to the first man, we find ourselves face to face with a Creator. Cf. Acts 17: 24–29.

b. There is, however, a difference between a creator and a father; and that distinction must be kept in mind, if we are to understand this lesson. A creator does not have the same feeling for his product that the father has for his child.

c. While God is the Creator of all mankind, he has imparted new life to those who have been redeemed by Christ — his spiritual children (cf. John 3:1–7); and when we pray, “Our Father,” we are not addressing the *Author* of our lives through Adam, but the *Father* of our new lives in Christ. See 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1–7; Gal. 4:6.

### (2) The provider for the needs of his offspring.

a. The providential care of God is essential to all life upon the earth; for physical life would be impossible without those things which He has provided for it. Cf. James 1:17; Matt. 5:45.

b. But having been redeemed from sin, and having thus become the Lord’s people in a special sense, all needed blessings, both temporal and spiritual, are assured us through our Father’s providential care in Christ. See Matt. 6:31–34; Phil. 4:6,7,19; Heb. 13:5,6; Eph. 1:3.

### (3) The education of his children.

a. Earthly parents who realize the value of learning want their children to have the best training they can afford.

b. The Father of our spirits has provided for all we need in this realm. See 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:3; cf. Heb. 12:3–13.

(4) The power and privilege of forgiving.

a. When the chastening has ended and the offender has repented, the sweetest experience the father can know is mutual reconciliation. Cf. Luke 15:11–24.

b. God as a living Father has, through Christ, made possible the forgiveness of every sin of which the penitent is guilty. See 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Luke 15:3–7.

2. God is in reality a Father; and all these blessings, and more, are implied when we do as Jesus taught, and say, “Our Father who art in heaven.”

## II. The Brotherhood of Man

1. The Fatherhood of God implies the brotherhood of man; for if God is *our* Father, then we not only are His children, but we are brethren. Cf. Heb. 2:11–13.

2. This brotherhood, however, is made possible only through Christ, and it is composed of all who have been born into God’s family. Cf. 1 Tim. 3:14,15; John 3:5; Gal. 3:26,27; John 17:14–16,20,21.

3. A true brotherhood must be spiritual in its nature, and held together by spiritual ties. Cf. John 13:34,35; 1 John 3:15; 4:20,21.

## III. The Source of Man’s Confidence and the Assurance of His Security

1. The present tense of the verb “to be” (*art*) implies that God is eternal. He is not therefore subject to the time and space concept of mortal man; and He cannot, for that reason, have an ending any more than He had a beginning. Cf. Heb. 11:6 – “God *is*.”

2. The term *heaven* is plural in the Greek (*ouranois*) and means, of course, the dwelling-place of God. This indicates

not only His *power*, but His *right*, as a Sovereign Ruler, to grant our requests.

3. Adam Clarke, *in loco*, points out that the expression, "who art in heaven," was very common among the Jews; and was used by them precisely in the same sense as it is used here by Jesus. The scriptural use of the phrase seems to set forth the following facts:

(1) His omnipresence, 1 Kings 8:27 Psalms 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23,24; Acts 17:27,28.

(2) His majesty and dominion over his creatures, 2 Chron. 20:5,6a.

(3) His power and might, 2 Chron. 20:6b.

(4) His omniscience, Psalm 11:4; 33:13-15; Acts 15:18; Romans 16:27.

(5) His infinite purity and holiness, Isaiah 57:15.

4. Thus, the safety and security of the child of God is summed up in the closing phrase of this salutation; for as long as God lives and continues to be, the faithful Christian, too, shall live in, with, and through Him who is the eternal Jehovah, and the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Cf. Matt. 28:18-20.

# Honoring the Name of God

*Hallowed be thy name.* —Matt. 6:9.

**Introduction:** 1. If we would pray acceptably to the Father, we must think first and predominantly of God; for unless our first desire is God's glory, that is, unless we seek above everything else to keep His character and person pure and holy in our own lives, there is little use in asking for His kingdom to spread, His will to be done, or anything else.

2. Most Bible students recognize the fact that the background from which Jesus taught was the Hebrew religion. The Jews of Bible times placed much more emphasis upon a name than we do. They gave names that had special meanings; and if the character of the individual did not accord with the name he wore, they changed the name to one that did. Cf. Abram, Abraham; Jacob, Israel; Simon, Peter; Saul, Paul; et al. Therefore, when such a petition as "Hallowed be thy name" was uttered in prayer, it was full of significance; for the name of God was tremendously important to them.

3. One of the evidences of divine revelation which we find in this prayer is the fact that the first part of it is not a request for temporal needs, but is designed to establish a spiritual attitude. The very first petition of this model prayer is intended to fix the thought of man on the greatness of God to whom he prays; for if a sense of His omnipotence is really stirred within us, there is no petition that we have the right to express that would strain the capacity of our faith; and if the sense of His holiness is ruling within us, we will not ask for any unworthy thing. Therefore, to



acknowledge the holiness and supremacy of God is to put ourselves in the proper spiritual atmosphere so necessary to acceptable prayer. But in studying this lesson, let us ask,

## **I. What Is Meant by Hallowing His Name?**

1. The original term from which we have the word "hallowed" is *hagiazō*, which means to set apart, sanctify, venerate, or acknowledge to be venerable. We cannot, of course, sanctify God in the literal sense of that word; but when we in our hearts separate Him from, and in our minds, conceptions, and desires, exalt Him above the earth, and all created things, we are, in a very real sense, sanctifying Him.

2. The first petition of this prayer, therefore, is that God's name be set apart from all things that are unlike Him, out of harmony with His revealed character and will, and unworthy of His holiness.

3. But, says one, His name *is* holy, being the expression of his sinless being; and it makes no difference what we do or do not do, we cannot add to or detract from it. That is true in the absolute; but since He put Himself within our reach by revelation and the Incarnation, we have the power to commit outrage upon His holy name.

4. The best way a child can honor the name of his father is to become just such a character as will please him; and in the same way, no one can hallow the name of God, unless he endeavors to live so as to hold God's name in reverence in the truest sense of that term. This petition, therefore, does not merely connote a sort of good wish for the Father, but involves a consecration of one's own life also, in order that he may honor the Father's name. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-17. *A drunken or profane son cannot honor a righteous or godly father's name.*

5. The importance of this petition, therefore, is at once plainly seen; for what men conceive God to be makes a vast difference in their lives and attitudes. Cf. the attributes

of God, as set forth in the author's book, *God Amid the Shadows*, p. 16ff.

(1) In ancient Hebrew usage the name of God signified His revealed character; and when one prayed that His name be hallowed it was as if he was praying that His holy nature be known and revered throughout the world. Cf. Ezk. 36:23; Psa. 148.

(2) Do we hallow the name of God when we worry? Think of what is implied in the name *Father*. Cf. Matt. 7:7-11; Phil. 4:6,7; Heb. 13:5,6. *This petition is the key to the treasures of God.*

## **II. The Name of God Is the Revelation of His Being**

1. We cannot worship God acceptably without knowing Him (cf. Acts 17:22ff), and we cannot know Him, except as He has revealed Himself to us. Therefore, to attempt to worship God without understanding something of His name is to attempt that which is practically impossible.

2. God's conception of the sacredness of His name is manifested in the manner in which He has revealed Himself, and in the forms which His name has taken.

(1) *El*; plural, *Elim*. This is a general word for God; and in addition to its use with reference to the one and only true God, it is also used to designate false gods, such as were worshipped by the nations of Old Testament days. Cf. the English "God" and "god."

a. This is the most widely distributed of all the names for Deity. It belonged to the primitive Shemitic speech before it became modified into dialects.

b. Cf. its use in compound words, such as "Israel," "Bethel," et al.

c. The root from which it comes means the mighty or strong one.

(2) *Eloah*; plural, *Elohim*. The use of this term is similar to that of *El*; and it is always associated with the idea of creation and the force and flow of the power of

God. The creatures who are literally the result of the word of *Elohim* would do well to consider the strength and power of Him whose name they speak so lightly in their casual conversations.

(3) *Adonai* (Hebrew, *Adonay*), Lord. This term is always used to designate the one and only true God.

(4) *Yahweh*, Jehovah. This is the proper name of the God of the Bible; and it was the most holy and the most significant of all the names that designated Deity, so far as the Israelites were concerned. Originally, the term was made up entirely of consonants — IHVH, the tetragrammaton, that is, the four consonants which formed the Hebrew “incommunicable name” of the Supreme Being. The true pronunciation has been lost; and it was not until 1820, the time of the Reformation, that the modern pronunciation came into use.

a. Inasmuch as the Jews considered it unlawful even to pronounce the name when reading the Hebrew Scriptures, the term *Adonai* was substituted for it, except when the term IHVH preceded or followed *Adonai* in the text, in which case the name *Elohim* was read in its stead.

b. In the course of time the vowels of *Adonai* or *Elohim* were combined with the consonants IHVH to form *Yehovah*, or, according to a later system of transliteration, *Jehovah*. This form, with an anglicized pronunciation, entered into the English Bible, and has come into general use as one of the names of God. The principal idea associated with the name is “The Self-existing One.” Cf. Ex. 3:13–15; John 8:58; Rev. 1–8; 4–8.

(5) *El Shaddai* (see Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3, margin), the All or Self-sufficient One. He can, therefore, do anything that accords with His will. Cf. what he did for Abraham and Sarah, Rom. 4:16ff.

(6) *El Elyon*, God Most High. See Gen. 14:18–20.

(7) *El Olam*, the Everlasting God. Cf. Gen. 21:33; Psa. 90:1,2; Isa. 40:27–31; 9:6 (margin).

3. The sense of dignity with which God surrounds His name is also seen in the safeguards which He has erected to defend it. Cf. Ex. 20:7; Isa. 42:8.

### **III. The Manner in Which We Hallow His Name**

1. This petition alone of all the six of this prayer is to be answered by the one who offers it. All the other requests in the model prayer depend upon the inexhaustible resources of God for their fulfillment; but this petition stands apart, distinguished and characterized by the unusual fact that the answer to the appeal is in the hands of him who makes it.

2. It is a significant observation that His name is hallowed by His entire creation, with the exception of two limited spheres.

(1) Cf. Rev. 4:8—11; Psalms 19:1—6.

(2) It is an amazing coincidence that only the devil, fallen angels, and sinful men fail to hallow the name of God. They alone form the coalition which seeks to usurp the authority of God and defame His holy name.

(3) While not always doing so intentionally, many professed Christians sometimes have a part in dishonoring the name of God. This is done, for example,

a. By keeping silent when He is denied and His name blasphemed.

b. By mentally consenting to false doctrines which are being advocated on every hand; and by otherwise encouraging those who teach them. Cf. Matt. 15:13 and the context; Tit. 3:10; 2 John 9—11. Christ died to establish certain basic teaching — teaching which is necessary to lead men back to God; and any one who sits by and encourages something contrary to His revealed will is not worthy of Him who made such a great sacrifice.

3. Thus, it is clearly seen that if this request is to be answered by us, we will be continually exalting, reveren-

cing, and glorifying His name by our attitude toward those things which are most clearly His.

(1) We hallow His name by maintaining an unswerving fidelity to His word. Cf. Psa. 119:89; 138:2; 119:105,11.

(2) By our attitude toward the church, which is His body, that is, by faithfully doing what He requires of us as members of that institution. See Heb. 10:24,25; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 3:14,15.

(3) By living a daily life of purity and holiness. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Pet. 1:15-17.

All praise to Him who reigns above

In majesty supreme;

Who gave His Son for man to die,

That he might man redeem.

Blessed be the name, blessed be the name,

Blessed be the name of the Lord;

Blessed be the name, blessed be the name,

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

— W. H. Clark.

# “Thy Kingdom Come”

*Thy kingdom cōme.* — Matt. 6:10a.

**Introduction:** 1. Those who read the New Testament carefully know that the Synoptic Gospels are largely occupied with preaching and teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven. John, Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy emphasized its near approach. Cf. Matt. 3:1–12; 4:17; 10:1–7; Luke 10:1–11.

2. Not only was the approaching kingdom the burden of the teaching and preaching during the Lord’s earthly ministry; it was the burden of prayer, too, as may be seen from the text now before us.

3. It is here assumed (it shall be pointed out later) that the kingdom referred to denotes the spiritual reign of the Messiah, or, what is the same thing, the church of Christ, or the Christian dispensation. It shall also be shown that the kingdom was formally established on the Pentecost of Acts 2; but this does not imply that the spirit and scope of the prayer now under consideration are confined to that occasion. It is, indeed, important to estimate aright the value of Acts 2 as furnishing evidence of the *starting point* of the Lord’s reign, the announcement of the terms of salvation in His kingdom, and the planting of His church; but it is only the beginning — the beginning of an institution which is to live as long as time shall last.

4. While therefore the petition now before us had a meaning on the lips of the original disciples which it cannot now have, it is still regarded by many Bible students as a suitable prayer for informed Christians, in its wider scope, as embracing the world-wide and age-lasting objectives and

achievements of the kingdom of Christ. But in studying this lesson, let us consider,

## **I. The Time of the Kingdom's Establishment**

1. See Dan. 2:44. In the preceding verses of this chapter, Daniel pictured four world powers — Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian (or Macedonian), and Roman; and since the establishment of the kingdom of God was promised during the time of the last of those kings, it would, of necessity, have to be established during the time of the Roman Empire. Cf. Dan. 2:34,45.

(1) The world powers mentioned by Daniel began with Nebuchadnezzar and ended with the fall of the Roman Empire in A. D. 476.

(2) Dan. 2:35 makes it certain that no one of these world powers will ever be revived. The kingdom of God, therefore, has certainly been established, or the prophecy of Daniel was not reliable. Cf. Dan. 2:45.

2. It is claimed by some that Christ, after offering the Jews the kingdom, postponed its establishment until some future date, because they rejected him; and that the church was set up instead. See *The Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 990, 1252 (footnote).

(1) The Scriptures make no such distinction between the "kingdom" and the "church." Cf. Matt. 16:18,19.

a. The "keys of the kingdom" were used to open the "doors of the church." See Acts 2:37-47.

b. The Lord's table in both the "kingdom" and the "church," if they are different institutions. Cf. Luke 22:29,30; 1 Cor. 11:17ff.

(2) The terms "kingdom" and "church" emphasize different features of the same institution.

a. If the institution is viewed from the standpoint of its *relation to the world*, it is referred to as a *church*. (The word "church" means the *called out*, or the *separated ones*.) See John 15:19; 17:14-16.

### 3. The testimony of the Scriptures:

(1) Dan. 7:13,14; Luke 19:11ff; Acts 1:9-11; Eph. 1:20-23.

(2) Isa. 2:2,3; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:18.

(3) Mark 9:1 (this statement was made after Jesus knew he would be rejected by the Jews, Mark 8:31ff); Acts 1:8; 2:1-4.

(4) Dan. 2:44; Matt. 16:18; Heb. 12:28.

4. It is claimed by some that Rev. 20:1-7 presents a situation which demands a future reign of Christ, a reign different from and in addition to his present reign; but even a cursory reading of that of that passage will show that it depicts a *martyr scene*. It is claimed that "the Bible clearly teaches that after the second coming of Christ and before the final resurrection and judgment, there will be an age or dispensation of one thousand years during which Christ will reign upon the earth." While it is claimed that the passage *clearly* teaches the proposition just quoted, it remains true that the passage does not even so much as mention the following necessary items to such a reign:

(1) The second coming of Christ.

(2) A reign on earth.

(3) A bodily resurrection.

(4) Any who will reign with Christ, except martyrs.

(5) Christ as being on earth, or his relation to that reign.

## II. The Nature and Purpose of This Kingdom,

Cf. Dan., chs. 2 and 7.

1. This kingdom differs from the kingdoms of this world in that it has a *divine origin*. See Dan. 2:34,35,44,45; 7:13, 14.

2. This kingdom is essentially aggressive and revolutionary in its spirit and aims.

(1) The little stone was to *smite* the image and break it to pieces.



(2) Therefore all who become citizens of this kingdom are enlisted in a positive, aggressive warfare against all that dishonors God and degrades humanity.

3. It was predicted that this kingdom would pass through *severe and protracted struggles with opposing powers*. Cf. the Book of Revelation which presents a panoramic view of the struggles and final triumph of the church.

(1) The little horn was to make war with the saints, and prevail against them. See Dan. 7:21,22.

(2) As in the personal history of her King, suffering must come before glory — the cross before the crown.

4. This kingdom aims at *universal dominion*. Its objectives are world-wide in their scope. Cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 15:25ff.

5. This kingdom will surely triumph.

(1) The little stone will become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. See Dan. 2:35; cf. Isa. 11:9.

(2) See Dan. 7:27.

6. Therefore, when the informed Christian employs this petition, it is a prayer for the overthrow of all governments and religions which oppose God; for the universal spread of the dominion of truth, holiness, and love; and for the uplifting of our sin-oppressed race from the hopeless grave where human governments and religions would leave it, to the dominion of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

### **III. The Means by Which These Objectives Are to be Accomplished**

1. There is, in this respect, the most remarkable contrast between earthly kingdoms and the kingdom of heaven. See John 18:33–37. *The kingdom of Christ is to be maintained by the power of truth, and not by the power of the sword. Its conquests are to be mighty, but bloodless.*

2. When Isaiah foresaw the establishing of the Lord's house and the results to follow, he revealed the source of

this revolutionizing and regenerating power. See Isa. 2:2-4; 11:2-4,9; cf. Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; John 6:63.

3. The complete harmony between Old Testament prophecies and New Testament facts and teaching on this point may be seen by considering the following statements:

(1) The mission of Christ, and therefore the mission of the kingdom, was to "bear witness unto the truth." See John 18:37.

(2) The Holy Spirit's part in the conversion of the world is associated with the truth. He is called the *Spirit of truth* (John 15:26); and the express promise to the apostles was that "he shall guide you into all the truth." See John 16:13.

(3) When the disciples were commissioned to push the conquests of His kingdom, the Lord bade them rely on the message of truth which was committed unto them, and on divine protection in its utterance. Cf. Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20.

(4) The first gift bestowed by the Spirit on the apostles, Christ's divinely appointed ambassadors, was the ability to speak the word of God in different languages, thereby confirming the truth and leading a multitude of people to accept the gospel. See Acts 2:1-41.

(5) The kingdom of heaven is compared to a sower going forth to sow; and the *seed of the kingdom* is declared to be the *word of God*. See Luke 8:11. It would be just as reasonable to expect wheat to grow where no seed has been sown, as to look for the fruit of the Spirit where the word of God has not been received into the heart.

(6) The failure to save men is traced directly to a failure to convey the truth to their hearts. See Matt. 13:15; cf. Rom. 10:15-17; 2 Cor. 4:3,4.

4. From these and kindred facts, we are bold to affirm that nothing else is needed for the conversion of the world except that which has been provided — viz., that men everywhere should hear, understand, believe, and obey the

word of truth, which is the gospel of our salvation. Cf. Eph. 1:13.

5. But it should be carefully observed that it is the word of God, not on the printed page, but *in the human heart*, that is to achieve this result; and with this fact in mind, let us consider,

#### **IV. The Means by Which the Word of God Is Conveyed to the Hearts of Men**

1. The means are both divine and human. It is, of course, impossible for us to know all the providential and spiritual agencies employed by the King in order to give free course to His message of salvation; but there are some well known facts which we may consider,

(1) We know that he has promised to be with his disciples in their work unto the end of the world, Matt. 28:20.

(2) We know that even in the case of inspired apostles their sufficiency was from God, 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 3:6,7.

(3) We know that they were divinely guided into some fields of labor, and divinely restrained from entering other fields, Acts 16:6–10.

(4) We know that Jesus taught his disciples to pray the Lord of harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest, Matt. 9:37,38.

2. With these facts in mind, we can readily perceive how vast a space is left for providential workings, and, consequently, for constant and earnest prayer, after all that belongs to human agency has been accomplished.

(1) Some people may be so far gone in sin and delusion as to be irrecoverable, Rom. 1:18–28.

(2) Others may be temporarily in an unfavorable condition for receiving the message of life; but by a series of natural circumstances their attitude may be changed, cf. Mark 5:1–20; 7:31–37.

(3) Christians, therefore, should learn to do the best they can, and then leave the rest with God, 1 John 4:4.

3. Human instrumentalities which are to be employed in the effort at saving men are clearly set forth in the New Testament. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9. *This responsibility rests upon every member of the church, every citizen of the kingdom.* Some of the human instrumentalities are:

(1) The testimony of a holy life, Matt. 5:14–16; 1 Thess. 1:6–9; Phil. 2:14–16; Rom. 14:16–18.

(2) The unity and love of the brethren, John 17:20,21; 13:35; Eph. 4:3–6.

(3) The maintenance of the work and worship of the church, 1 Tim. 3:15.

(4) The public preaching of the gospel, Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:21; Acts 8:4.

4. Thus, when the petition which we are now considering is intelligently offered by the faithful child of God, it signifies that the welfare of the kingdom of Christ is uppermost in his mind, and that he is not willing that anything should have more emphasis in his life than it. Cf. Matt. 6:33.

# “Thy Will Be Done”

*Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.*

— Matt. 6:10b.

**Introduction:** 1. The climax of the first division of the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples to pray comes in the third petition, the petition now under consideration. That which is at least partially implied in the first two petitions is given full expression in this one. Anyone who is truly interested in the glory of God and the spreading of His kingdom here among men will certainly want His will to be done in him, through him, and around him.

2. The “will” referred to is evidently that which God wants His people to do; for God’s will in a general sense includes His will for the universe, for the sun, the planets, etc., as well as for His people. The thing that should concern every child of God is that God’s will be done by people who live here on the earth, and who are morally responsible to Him. But in studying this lesson, let us ask,

## **I. What Is God’s Will for Us?**

1. God’s will, in so far as we are concerned, is never contrary to that which is set forth in His written Word. Cf. Psa. 119:89; 2 Tim. 3:16,17.

2. The following references to the Scriptures will give us a concrete idea of that which is embraced in the will of God for us:

(1) 1 Tim. 2:3,4; 2 Pet. 3:9.

(2) 1 Thes. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; John 17:17.

(3) 1 Thess. 5:16–18.

(4) 1 Pet. 2:13–17.

3. While emphasizing the fact that God's will for us and all men is revealed in the New Testament, we should not fail to distinguish between that which may be spoken of as the "directive" will of God and that which may be called the "permissive" will of God.

(1) The *directive* will of God may be defined as the specific direction of God in that which pertains to our lives. Cf. Phil. 4:6,7.

(2) The *permissive* will of God refers to the latitude of human choice which he allows His people in things which are not inherently evil.

a. The hour of meeting on the Lord's day. He directs that we meet, but permits us to select the particular time.

b. The particular person one should marry, or whether or not he should marry at all. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:39.

c. God *directs* as to the character of the men who shall serve as elders, but He *permits* us to select the particular individuals. This principle is fully illustrated in Acts 6:1ff.

## II. The Necessary Attitude of Heart

1. No one has the right to offer this petition unless he is willing to pay the price involved in the answer to it.

(1) Do we really *want* to see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven? Cf. John 4:34 5:30; 2 Cor. 5:9.

(2) Are we personally prepared to make such changes in our own lives which would certainly come if His will were done in them; Cf. Matt. 26:36ff; Acts 22:10.

(3) Do we really desire that God's will shall have free course in us, in forming our attitudes and governing our practices? Cf. Gal. 2:20.

2. In offering this petition, one does not ask God to accomplish His own will while he resigns himself to his fate. It is rather a prayer in which he offers himself, without

reserve, in dedication, and expresses his willingness to do whatever God may desire him to do.

Not in dumb resignation we lift our hands on high,  
Not like the nerveless fatalist, content to do and die;  
Our faith springs like the eagle, who soars to meet the sun,  
And cries exulting unto Thee, "O Lord, Thy will be done."

— John Hay.

3. No one can have the proper attitude towards God's will while attempting to substitute something else for that which God has expressly stated. Cf. 1 Sam. 15:22. There are some people who, when the teaching of the Bible has been clearly pointed out to them, frankly admit that the Bible says so and so, and then calmly and coolly cast it aside by saying, "But this is what happened to me." The finality of revelation is in the Bible, not in human experience; and it is presumptuous to proceed on the unconscious assumption that experience is superior to revelation.

### III. The Divine Criterion

1. "Thy will be done, *as in heaven, so on earth.*" How is God's will done in heaven? Cf. Psalms 103:20,21; Revelation 22:3c.

2. The life of Jesus is a living illustration of the principle involved in this petition. Cf. John 8:29; Hebrews 10:7; John 6:38.

3. While it is impossible to live a life of perfection while here in the flesh, there is every reason why we should strive toward that end. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9; Philippians 3:7-11. "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart knows no rest till it rests in thee." (Augustine.)

# “Our Daily Bread”

*Give us this day our daily bread. — Matt. 6:11.*

**Introduction:** 1. There have been Bible students who have looked upon Jesus as a dreamer and an idealist, and as such they have considered Him an impractical visionary. But if one is willing to engage in an intimate study of His life and teaching, he will be convinced that such is not the case; for no one can consider all the facts concerning Him without reaching the conclusion that He was deeply concerned with everything that had reference to life and human need.

2. His audience on the occasion of the teaching regarding this prayer was made up, not of temple doctors and the scholars of the day, but largely of His unschooled followers; and with that character of audience before Him, it is not at all strange that He would face problems to which common men with untutored minds are heirs. But in studying this lesson, let us consider,

## **I. Our Dependence Upon God**

1. It is doubtful if there are many here today who have ever uttered this petition on the morning of a day when they did not really know where the bread for that day was to come from.

(1) In view then of this all but universal attitude toward this petition, it is in order to ask, Did Jesus mean for all of His disciples to utter it?

(2) The obvious answer is Yes; for we are all, whether we realize it or not, dependent upon God; and only the



frailest wall of His providence, at anytime, intervenes between us and want.

(3) No one can please God who does not recognize and acknowledge his dependence upon Him. Cf. James 1:17. To put our trust in riches or any other source for our daily needs is to manifest a lack of trust in God. See Matt. 6:24; Heb. 11:6.

2. The central thought in the petition now before us is that we look to God for our daily needs; and with this view of the subject we can easily see that not only are we praying for bread, but also for peace of mind.

(1) No one can do his best in life without this peace of mind; but lest he should become satisfied and cease to depend upon God, he is taught to pray, not for an abundance for the future, but only for the present.

(2) The testimony of the Scriptures: Deut. 32:10-15; Prov. 30:7-9; 1 Tim. 6:17.

3. There are those who say that this is a law-abiding universe, and that to ask for temporal blessings is to ask God to interfere with the operation of His own laws. But if scientists can use their imperfect knowledge of these laws in order to bring about results for the benefit of mankind, as they are doing every day, then why should anyone think it too much to ask the Omnipotent and Benevolent heavenly Father to use His infinite knowledge of the same laws to bring about results which will be helpful to His own children?

4. Since God has made it plain that He wants His children to trust in Him for the necessities of life, and has specifically promised that He will give good things to them that ask Him, we can, without any doubt at all, put our trust in Him. His own honor is involved in the keeping of His promises; and there is no conceivable circumstance that can alter the obligation of God to fulfill all that He has pledged Himself to accomplish.

Why should my heart be ever distressed  
By dread of future ill?  
Or why should unbelieving fear  
My trembling spirit fill?  
Each hour I trust Thy love divine,  
And look to Thee alone,  
To calm each troubled thought to rest,  
In prayer before Thy throne.  
Casting all my care upon Him,  
Casting all my care upon Him,  
Casting all my care upon Him,  
For He careth for me.

## II. An Exegetical Question

1. There has been, in all probability, more discussion over the petition now under consideration than over all the rest of the prayer put together. The particular point in question is with reference to the word from which we have "daily." The original word, *epiousios*, is not found in Greek literature outside of Matt. 6:11 and Luke 11:3; and it is not certain that it has been found anywhere in that literature since the evangelists penned those documents.

2. The literal meaning of the expression "our daily bread" is, according to Thayer and other Greek scholars, "the bread of our necessity," with the word *bread* extended to mean "food of any kind."

3. Scholars, however, are not agreed as to whether the reference is to the *day* on which the prayer is uttered, or "the morrow." see marginal reading in *The American Standard Version*, *The Revised Standard Version*, and Moffatt's Translation: "Give us today our bread for the morrow."

4. The scholars who favor Moffatt's Translation, and the marginal readings referred to, profess to see a connection between *epiousios*, as used by Matthew and Luke, and the

participle *epiouse* (from *epeimi*) found in Acts 16:11 and translated "the day following."

5. It is urged in support of the "morrow" viewpoint that Jesus had in mind, not only man's need for bread, but also his anxiety about it; thus making the prayer, not only a petition for the necessary food, but also the antithesis to worry. This of course, could be true; but in view of other teaching in the Bible on the subject, there does not seem to be any necessity for saying that it is. If the Lord provides for our needs today, there is every reason for believing that He will do the same tomorrow, if tomorrow comes to us. Cf. Matt. 6:24-34; Deut. 33:25; Ex. 16:4ff; Phil. 4:6,7. Care for us *today*, O Lord, and *tomorrow* we shall be back with the same humble, trusting petition!

### III. Some Errors to Avoid Regarding Our Daily Bread

1. A lack of concern over personal responsibility in its acquisition. Cf. Gen. 3:17-19; 2 Thess. 3:10-12.

2. The attitude of anxiety and the practice of fretting ("a weak complaining without thought of accomplishment or changing anything, but merely as a relief to one's own *disquiet*" — Fernald, *English Synonyms, Antonyms, and Prepositions* against the providential works of a wise heavenly Father. See Matt. 6:25ff.

3. A feeling of pride and security in physical possessions. Cf. Rev. 3:17ff.

4. The offense of greed with reference to one's own possessions. See Luke 12:13-21; 16:19ff.

### IV. A Guard Against Selfishness

1. The spirit of selfishness is utterly foreign to the teaching and requirements of Jesus. See Matt. 16:24; 1 John 3:17.

2. We are not encouraged to say, "Give *me* this *day* my daily bread;" instead, we are to pray for others as well as for ourselves. God intends for His gifts to His children to be shared. An impartial Father will not consent to a program that gives one man more than enough for His needs, while another is unable to feed and clothe himself and his family.

3. This kind of an attitude makes one interested in other people; and feeling that way, he cannot be indifferent to their needs. Cf. Luke 10:25ff.

# Forgiveness

*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*  
— Matt. 6:12.

**Introduction:** 1. The word “forgiveness” has been described as the most beautiful word in any language, either human or divine. But this word is as great as it is beautiful. Love is represented in the Bible as being greater than either faith or hope; but when one considers that in forgiveness we have love in action, he can begin to have some idea of the greatness of forgiveness.

2. This petition for forgiveness meets a demand that is just as universal as the one for daily bread. The whole Bible was written on the assumption that all men are sinners. Cf. Rom. 3:10,23. Their sensitiveness toward sin may not be very outstanding in most instances; but that does not in any way remove their guilt. Men are sinners; and as such they need to offer this petition.

3. A large part of the troubles and heartaches of this world is caused by a failure to practice the teaching of Jesus concerning forgiveness. It seems strange that so many professed Christians have such unforgiving spirits. In many cases those who have done the wrong are less willing to show kindness toward those whom they have mistreated than are the ones who have suffered the wrong. Cf. Prov. 26:28. This is but one illustration of the general principle that whoever injures another person is almost certain to hate the one whom he has injured. In many instances, as we shall see further on in this study, this is simply an effort on the part of the one who has done the wrong to excuse him-

self for his misconduct. But in studying this lesson, let us ask,

## **I. What Is Forgiveness?**

1. The forgiveness which God grants is, beyond dispute, true forgiveness; and if we can learn what it involves, we shall know what forgiveness really is.

(1) The testimony of the Scriptures: Isa. 1:18; Heb. 10:17.

(2) This does not imply that God ceases to know that we have sinned against Him, or even what our specific sins may have been; but it does imply that, having forgiven us, He treats us as if we had never sinned against Him. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–20; Rom. 4:7,8.

2. Forgiveness of sins does not mean that the one forgiven is in all respects made just what he would have been, had he not committed the sins for which he has received forgiveness.

(1) The guilt of sin may be forgiven and entirely removed; but the Bible does not teach that such is true of the effects of sin. Cf. Gal. 6:7,8; 1 Cor. 15:9.

I walked through the woodland meadows,  
Where sweet the thrushes sing,  
And I found on a bed of mosses  
A bird with a broken wing.  
I healed its wound, and each morning  
It sang its old, sweet strain;  
But the bird with a broken pinion  
Never soared as high again.

I found a young life broken  
By sin's seductive art,  
And, touched with Christlike pity,  
I took him to my heart.  
He lived with a noble purpose,  
And struggled not in vain;

But the life that sin had strickened  
Never soared as high again.  
But the bird with the broken pinion  
Kept another from the snare,  
And the life that sin had strickened  
Raised another from despair.  
Each loss has its compensation —  
There is healing for every pain;  
But the bird with the broken pinion  
Never soars as high again.

— Hezekiah Butterworth.

(2) There is a direct and personal injury done to each sinner by every sin which he commits; and while both God and man can and do forgive the sinner, they cannot and do not remove the personal effects upon the wrong-doer which are inflicted by his sins.

(3) These solemn truths, when duly considered, should have a powerful influence in restraining sinners from the commission of sins, and in leading them to choose the way of righteousness as a constant course of living.

## **II. How Is Forgiveness to Be Obtained**

1. The text teaches that we are to pray for forgiveness; but that does not any more imply that we are to receive forgiveness unconditionally, than it does that bread will be given to us, without any effort on our part, in answer to prayer. Although we are to pray for both, we also must meet the conditions upon which God has promised to bestow them.

2. The conditions which must be met before God will forgive sins in answer to prayer are:

(1) The sinner must confess, that is, acknowledge or admit his sin. Cf. 1 John 1:9.

(2) The petitioner must repent, that is, resolve to

renounce or forsake the sin for which he is asking forgiveness. See Acts 8:22.

(3) Not only must the sinner confess and repent with reference to a particular sin in order to get forgiveness for it; he must do that for all sins of which he is guilty; for it is inconceivable that God would forgive one sin, while the sinner continues to harbor other sins. Cf. Prov. 28:13; Job 31:33; John 3:19–21.

3. No one has a greater desire or is more willing to forgive sins than God; but even He cannot forgive one who will not acknowledge his sins, or who remains impenitent. Cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 2:23,26–38.

(1) Christ loved them while they were yet sinners (Rom. 5:6–8), wanted them to repent, and suffered and died to bring them to repentance; but it was necessary for them to repent before they could be forgiven. Cf. Acts 3:14–19.

(2) Sin results from the exercise of the freedom of one's will power; but when that is done a corresponding responsibility has been incurred, which makes repentance an absolute necessity before remission of sin can be enjoyed. Cf. Acts 17:30,31.

### **III. A Deep Sense of Sin**

1. Most careful observers will testify to the fact that when two people have a difference, it is harder to get the one who has done the wrong to be friendly with the one he has wronged, than it is to get the one who has suffered the wrong to be friendly with the one who has wronged him.

2. There are two reasons for this attitude on the part of the sinner which should be considered here:

(1) He does not want to admit his wrong, and thereby condemn himself. That, of course, is intellectual dishonesty, and any one who stops to think knows that it



is just as necessary to be honest intellectually, as it is to be honest in the material things of life. Cf. Phil. 4:8,9.

(2) He does not have a deep sense of sin and its consequences. If this is not true, then, he is depraved and has no desire to please the Lord.

3. Jesus, in the text, in Matt. 6:14,15, and in Luke 11:4, uses three different words for sin:

(1) Debts (*opheilema*); debtors (*opheiletes*); indebted (*opheilo*). Sin is here pictured as a debt, and the sinner as a debtor. Sin, therefore, is both a wrong and requires a satisfaction. The sinner remains a debtor as long as he fails to make amends to the one whom he has sinned against, whether it be God or man. The idea underlying the root from which these words come is that the debtor was previously held by some obligation, or bound by some duty. Cf. Gal. 5:3; 6:1,2.

(2) Trespass (*para-ptoma*). This, literally, is a "falling to one side," a lapse or deviation from truth and uprightness.

(3) Sin (*hamartia*). The idea here is "missing the mark," or a failure to hit the mark — a failure to do what is required, whether by omission or commission, in thought, feeling, speech, or action. One who has sinned in this sense has failed to do his duty, or has missed the true end and scope of his life. Cf. James 4:17; 1 John 3:4; 5:17.

4. The text makes it plain that one can and does sin against both God and man — he is under obligation to both, cf. Micah 6:8; and a person who takes this view of sin must realize that there is nothing else for him to do than to ask forgiveness from him whom he has offended.

#### IV. The Spirit of Forgiveness

1. It is obvious, even to the superficial, that this prayer can be offered acceptably only by a Christian; for to no one else has the Lord promised to give remission of sins in answer to prayer. And, too, the fact that Christians are

taught to pray for the forgiveness of their sins is conclusive evidence that the Lord did not expect His followers to attain to sinless perfection in this life. Cf. 1 John 1:5-10.

2. We have already seen that when the Lord forgives a sin He does not remember that sin again, but treats the one forgiven as if he had never sinned against Him at all. This, without a doubt, is the spirit that must characterize the one who forgives his fellow man. See Eph. 4:32 Col. 3:12, 13.

His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of a wrong.

— Emerson.

(1) While this is true, it does not mean that the one forgiven should presume to draw heavily upon the forbearance of the one whom he has injured, until he has given ample proof that his repentance has been genuine.

(2) It seems that some flagrant sinners almost demand, after they have made a simple confession of their wrongs, that they immediately be accorded a place of honor and esteem by the one whom they have wronged. Cf. Luke 15:18ff.

3. As pointed out earlier in this study, the Lord Himself cannot forgive the impenitent; and if He cannot, then certainly we cannot! But we can and must follow His example in endeavoring to bring the offender to repentance. *We must always have a forgiving spirit, that is, we must always be willing, anxious, and ready to forgive.* Cf. Mark 11:25.

(1) It is impossible to pray for a person in the spirit of the New Testament, and hate him at the same time — to pray for one, and still harbor an unforgiving spirit toward him.

(2) When Jesus was offended, He did not regard the offense personally; instead, He looked upon it as the revelation of a deep need in the person who committed it.

That should be our attitude toward the offenses that are directed toward us. In each of them God is giving us a twofold opportunity.

a. To spread abroad the spirit of Christ through the magnanimity of our own conduct. Cf. Matt. 5:10,12; Luke 6:22,23.

b. To go to the offender, especially if he is a brother, and teach him that which is right. Cf. Matt. 18:15-17.

(3) With this view, we should not regard the sins committed against us with animosity, but as an opportunity to let our lights shine so that others, seeing our good works, may be led to glorify our Father who is in heaven. *How many ruptures in the church would have been prevented, if this teaching of Jesus had been faithfully followed!*

4. To have a forgiving spirit does not mean that one must think that the one who injured him did right. On the contrary, he may be very certain that he himself has been grossly mistreated; still it is his duty to have a forgiving spirit toward the one who sinned against him, even though the sinner never shows any signs of penitence for the wrong that he has committed. Cf. Luke 17:3,4.

Forgiveness to the injured does belong,  
But they never pardon who have done the wrong.  
— Dryden.

5. Would any thoughtful Christian come into the presence of the heavenly Father seeking mercy for himself, while his own heart was filled with a bitter desire for revenge? If he should do so, the Lord's answer to him would be, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Cf. Rom. 12:17-21; Matt. 18:21-35.

The fairest action of our human life  
Is scorning to revenge an injury;  
For who forgives without a further strife,  
His adversary's heart to him doth tie:  
And 'tis a firmer conquest, truly said,  
To win the heart than overthrow the head.  
— Lady Elizabeth Carew.

# The Problem of Temptation

*And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*  
— Matt. 6:13.

**Introduction:** 1. The petition which is now to be considered is, perhaps, the most difficult to be understood. However, if we are willing to let the general teaching of the New Testament on this subject come before us, many of the difficulties which at first beset us will disappear.

2. Those who study this model prayer should bear in mind the fact that it is a carefully organized whole in which the various parts can be correctly understood only in terms of the whole, and in their relation to each other. This final petition, therefore, must be considered in the light of what has already been said in this prayer, and, particularly, in the light of the petition which immediately precedes it.

3. The petition for forgiveness involves the admission of sin — that which has already been done; while the petition regarding temptation looks to the future. When we remember our sins and realize the fact that we cannot, in and of ourselves, pay the debt in which they have involved us, we cry unto our heavenly Father for forgiveness; and if our cry is uttered in faith and sincerity, He will hear and abundantly pardon. When one fully realizes the meaning of sin and forgiveness, he does not want to fall into the hands of the tempter again; and it is quite natural, therefore, for him to pray, "And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." And as we thus offer this petition, we acknowledge both our own weakness and the strength of God which is available to us. But in studying this lesson, let us consider,

## **I. The Meaning of the Word "Temptation"**

1. The word in the original from which we have our term "temptation" is frequently found in the New Testament. Its exact shade of meaning, however, is not always the same, as may easily be seen by considering the various contexts in which the word is found.

2. The word sometimes carries with it the idea of seduction or an inducement to sin.

(1) Temptation in this sense may arise, either from one's inward desires, from outward circumstances, or from both together. Cf. James 1:14; 1 Tim. 6:9; Luke 4:13; 8:13; Josh. 7:19-21.

(2) But when James 1:13 is taken into consideration, it is obvious that this is not the meaning of the term as used by Jesus in the model prayer.

3. The word is also used in the sense of tempting or making trial of God. This is done by rebellious men who, as it were, endeavor to put His power and justice to the test and challenge them to show themselves. See Heb. 3:8,9; cf. Deut. 6:16. This, however, is also not the meaning that Jesus had in mind when He was teaching His disciples to pray.

4. The word is frequently used in the sense of trying or testing one's fidelity, integrity, character, etc. See James 1:2,12; 1 Pet. 1:6,7; Rev. 3:10. This is evidently the sense in which Christ used the term as found in the passage now under consideration.

## **II. Our Attitude Toward These Trials**

1. Since God is always seeking the good of His children, we should never regard these times of testing as detrimental to our ultimate welfare, especially if we will trust in the Lord and do our part.

(1) *Gold* comes from the refiner's fire; *wheat* from the threshing-floor; and *wisdom* from the chastening rod.

(2) The testimony of the Scriptures: 1 Pet. 1:6,7; James 1:2,12.

2. In order to help us endure these trials and to be benefitted by them, we should bulwark ourselves with great examples of those who have been successful in this respect.

(1) Some Bible examples: Joseph, Gen. 45:5,8; 50:20; Job, chapters 1 and 2; Heb. 11:32-12:2.

(2) The experience of Abraham Lincoln is a good illustration from secular history: While yet a young man he ran for the legislature of his state and was defeated. He then entered business, and failed; and spent seventeen years paying the debts of a worthless partner. He fell passionately in love with the girl of his choice who loved him in return, and then she died. He was elected to Congress in 1846, and served one term; but when he ran for re-election he was defeated. He tried, next, to get an appointment to the United States Land Office, but failed. He then became a candidate for the United States Senate, but was defeated. In 1856 he failed to receive the nomination for the vice-presidency, and then two years later Douglas defeated him for the United States Senate. When at last he became President, the first thing that happened was a great war which he would have given his life to prevent. And, finally, of his four sons, only one lived to maturity. Thus practically all of his life was a time of testing; but in Washington there is a memorial to him which some of us can hardly enter without tears, while in the heart of the nation and of the world there is a memorial to him which shall last for ages.

3. However, our greatest source of strength comes from the divine resources, backed by God's eternal purpose, and which all the temporal adversaries can never defeat. Cf. Rom. 8:28; 2 Pet. 3:8; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

(1) There are some people who have never known what vital Christianity really means; and now, faced with an emergency, they are unprepared. Life, as a rule, is a

series of ambushes; and when trouble comes there is little time to get ready for it. Cf. *Psa.* 119:11.

(2) A great artist painted a picture of a young knight at the edge of a dark woodland through which he had to pass. That woodland contained all manner of lurking perils and stealthy enemies, but before entering it the young knight took off his helmet, and poured out his soul in prayer. At the foot of the picture were these words: "Into Thy hands, O Lord." We, too, like that young knight, stand face to face with all manner of dangers and perils; fierce and deadly temptations of many kinds will assail us as we make our way through life. What better can we do than commit ourselves into the keeping of the same gracious and mighty Father? "Into Thy hands, O Lord, we commit ourselves!" Cf. *1 Cor.* 10:13.

(3) When the Nazis took over Holland, so the story goes, one of the first cases of resistance they encountered was in an official at the Hague. The Nazis commanded him to inquire of any person applying for a position whether the applicant had Jewish ancestry. The official called his staff together and said, "As a confessing Christian and as a Dutchman I cannot ask any one this question. It is against the deepest foundations of our faith in Jesus Christ, in whom God revealed Himself to all men and before whom all men are equal, to prefer one man to another because he belongs to a certain race or a certain nationality." He stood his ground and they sent him to a concentration camp; but when the sudden testing time came, he was ready. Cf. *Dan.* 3:1ff; 6:1ff.

### **III. Our Relation to Temptation**

-1. Temptation, in some form or another, is all but inescapable. Every normal person is continually being brought into situations which try the soul.

(1) A man who has lost his wife, his material possess-



ions, or his means for a livelihood, may be tempted to drown his sorrow in drink. A man who loses his health, and learns that he may spend the rest of his life in bed or an invalid's chair, may be tempted to give himself up to bitter and impotent resentment. A man whose wife and children are hungry and in need of the ordinary comforts of life, may be tempted to take a job under conditions which otherwise would be repulsive to him.

(2) It should be observed, however, that situations which try men's souls are not all of a depressing nature. Prosperity, adulation, or the possession of power very often puts men to the test. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:9; Prov. 26:28b; 29:5; 1 Tim. 3:6.

2. Although we are frequently brought into situations which severely test our characters, it does not necessarily follow that we are acquiescing in the temptations themselves.

3. On the contrary, we are to pray that we be spared the trial; but if in the providence of God it is best for us, or for the cause of Christ, that we be subjected to it, we should make every effort not to think, say, or do anything that would be contrary to His will. See Heb. 4:15; cf. Matt. 4:1-11. Achan, as we have already seen, not only was placed in a situation in which he was tempted; he also entered into the temptation. Cf. James 1:13-16; Rom. 12:21.

4. When considered in the light of other New Testament passages on this question — James 1:2,12, for example — the significance of the first part of the petition now under consideration is, Do not permit us to be overthrown by any device of our adversaries, whether men or demons.

#### **IV. "But Deliver Us from the Evil One"**

1. Here is our greatest source of hope. God has never yet allowed any man to be put into a position in which there is no alternative but to sin. See 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pet. 2:9.

2. If God, therefore, delivers us from the evil one, how does He do it?

(1) As already seen, there is a difference between being confronted with a temptation, and entering into it. Furthermore, it is only when one's sinful desire comes into action that he enters into the temptation. Therefore, to be delivered from the evil one is to be freed from the grip of these base desires.

(2) It is here that prayer helps us. See Luke 22:40. No one can pray as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, without fixing his thoughts upon God; and when that is done the heart is opened to Him, and the whole situation changes. His presence fills our conscious mind, dominates our outlook, and influences our will. Cf. Matt. 26:36ff; John 14:30; Rom. 6:6—11.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear;

What a privilege to carry

Ev'rything to God in prayer.

O, what peace we often forfeit,

O, what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Ev'rything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful,

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness:

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,

Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Saviour, still our refuge —

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?

Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,  
Thou wilt find a solace there.

(3) Since we are asking God to bring about our deliverance from the evil one, we must be willing to accept the deliverance which He, in His wisdom, is willing to grant. Cf. Heb. 5:7-10; 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

(4) Furthermore, as has frequently been pointed out in this series of studies on prayer, we must be willing to conform to His will, in whatever things He may want us to do, as well as pray. See Eph. 6:10ff.

Sweet hour of pray'r, sweet hour of pray'r!  
That calls me from a world of care,  
And bids me, at my Father's throne,  
Make all my wants and wishes known.  
In seasons of distress and grief  
My soul has often found relief,  
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,  
By thy return, sweet hour of pray'r.  
Sweet hour of pray'r, sweet hour of pray'r!  
The joy I feel, the bliss I share,  
Of those whose anxious spirits burn  
With strong desires for thy return.  
With such I hasten to the place  
Where God, my Saviour, shows His face,  
And gladly take my station there,  
And wait for Thee, sweet hour of pray'r.  
Sweet hour of pray'r, sweet hour of pray'r!  
Thy wings shall my petition bear  
To Him whose truth and faithfulness  
Engage the waiting soul to bless.  
And since He bids me seek His face,  
Believe His Word, and trust His grace,  
I'll cast on Him my ev'ry care,  
And wait for Thee, sweet hour of pray'r.

# Prayer as a Factor in Behavior

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

— Matt. 7:7–11.

**Introduction:** 1. We have in the text before us another demonstration of the fact that the ethical and spiritual code of Jesus is superior to and different from any other that has ever been offered to the world. In no other system do we find prayer introduced as a major factor in the behavior of men. Prayer for the Christian, therefore, has an added significance; and the entire practice has been raised to its ultimate height by the King of the final kingdom.

2. In the first five verses of the chapter from which the text is taken the idea of censoriousness in judging was condemned by Jesus; and lest His disciples should think that they were prohibited from judging at all, He taught them in verse six that judging was necessary, but that it must be done with discrimination. And then, as a final summary of His teaching regarding the attitude of His disciples toward their fellow men, the Lord gave, in verse twelve, what we known as The Golden Rule. Thus, when one reads the first twelve verses of the chapter, he can see the setting of the text now under consideration.

3. The distinction between censoriousness and discrimination is so fine as to create a serious difficulty, a difficulty which may well fill the thoughtful disciple with fear. *How are we to act in obedience to the warning that we are not to pass judgment on others; and at the same time to discriminate so carefully as always to keep holy things from dogs, and pearls from swine?* These questions are both necessary and vital; and the answer to them is found in the lesson of the text. If we follow the instruction of Jesus given here, we shall not only know how to use discrimination with reference to our fellow men as we should; we shall also have a secret which will affect our everyday-living as few things can do. But in studying this lesson, let us begin by considering,

### **I. Prayer as a Scientific Investigation**

1. Some one has said that the greatest lack in the ordinary Christian life is the absence of a science of the spiritual. With many of us religious experience is more or less haphazard and unrelated. We do not seem to realize that our greatest blessings are to be carefully and systematically sought after. Supposed we viewed our material blessings as we usually do our spiritual?

2. Science, as we know it today, is forever asking, seeking, knocking; and it is in this sense that we should regard the spiritual realm. When these activities are applied to the spiritual realm, they at once indicate a recognition that it is only through them that we can attain the highest good possible for us in this life. *It would not be out of place to speak of them as the laws of prayer.*

3. While it is possible that Jesus meant to use the terms "ask," "seek," and "knock," as synonyms, repeated for emphasis, it is hardly probable. It is more likely that there is in them the idea of progress. With this latter view in mind, let us consider the probable significance of each of the three words:

(1) *Ask*. This is a literal request; and it represents the beginning of the progressive nature of prayer. And, too, the very fact that the child must ask indicates the dependence of the petitioner — a consciousness of need. Contrast the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:9–14. Furthermore, it presupposes belief in a personal God with whom we can have fellowship, and one who can and does answer the prayers of His children.

(2) *Seek*. This, obviously, is a figurative expression and indicates a persistent effort on the part of the petitioner — “seek in order to find.” One must always be willing to do his part toward getting his prayers answered.

(3) *Knock*. This, too, is a figurative expression and suggests perseverance. Cf. Acts 12:13–16. Importunity is a definite feature of prayer as taught by Jesus. See Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–8.

4. Many of our prayers are uttered with too much thoughtlessness and indifference — so much so that we often forget even the subject of them. If true believers will but take the time to review their lives, they will find but few things for which they earnestly prayed — sought after “scientifically” — that were denied them by God. Cf. Phil. 4:6,7; Psa. 84:11. Cf. the spirit of scientists; *forever asking, seeking, knocking*.

## II. The Assurance of Success

1. After having showed His disciples their part in approaching God, Jesus next reveals the attitude of God toward them; and what was true of them is also true of Christians now. If we ask as He directs, He is willing to bestow; if we seek, He will provide the answer to the quest; and if we knock, He will open the door to that which we need.

2. In the matter of living, and especially in our attitude toward one another, no one can please the Lord who does not act in harmony with His will. But when we consider

the fact that the sinful world in which we live presents problems and throws obstacles in the way which are too great for men in their own strength to solve and overcome, we are likely to ask, "How can we live as the Lord commands us to in a world like this?" The answer is found in the text now before us — ask, seek, knock; and when that is done, we put ourselves in touch with final Wisdom and ultimate Power, so that we are prepared to deal with any situation that may come before us. Cf. James 1:5–8. *Thus, it is clearly seen that prayer is a major factor in human behavior.*

3. However, it should be carefully observed that whatever wider application we may make of the Lord's teaching here regarding prayer, its primary application in this place is to our behavior toward our fellow men. He teaches us to pray for divine help in order that we may make sure that we are neither censorious, nor lacking in the true principles of discrimination.

### III. The Father Knows

1. When we study the teaching of the Bible regarding the relationship between God and man, we are impressed with two major viewpoints — viz: the *contrast* between God and man (cf. Isa. 55:8,9; 59:1,2), and their *kinship* (see Rom. 8:16,17; 1 John 3:1,2). The Bible keeps these truths together in its teaching; and they should always be blended in our faith.

(1) The first evokes in us humility which bows the soul in awe, and causes us to realize our undone condition without God.

(2) The second inspires us with a sense of dignity and value of the soul, and of a destiny beyond our fondest dreams.

2. Jesus, of course, always held these two truths in perfect balance; yet in the lesson before us, He rested His

teaching upon the kinship of God and man. *He emphasized what God is and His attitude toward His children.*

(1) If earthly fathers are good to their children, will not the heavenly Father be good to His children?

(2) If earthly fathers do not disappoint and mock the hunger (needs) of their children, can anyone expect the heavenly Father to disappoint and deceive His children?

(3) If earthly fathers are discriminating in their gifts to their children, withholding harmful things and bestowing only good things, will not the heavenly Father do as much?

3. But the whole force of the argument which Jesus makes is to be found in the words "how much more." If we as earthly parents, selfish and sinful as we are at best, know how to deal kindly with our children, *how much more* must He who is both infinitely wise and good deal with His children who have been redeemed by the blood of His only begotten Son, and who are faithfully endeavoring to please Him!

4. No one who understands the teaching of the Bible regarding prayer thinks that prayer is a means of altering the will of God. On the contrary, prayer is one of the chief means of getting the will of God done; for when rightly engaged in, it brings us closer to God and more in harmony with His will, so that He can do more with and for us than otherwise He could do.

5. Some one has said that prayer is the boat-hook that brings, not the land to the boat, but the boat to the land; and there is no way of knowing how much it will do for us until we try it.



# “Through Jesus Christ Our Lord”

*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Rom. 7:25.*

**Introduction:** 1. Jesus Christ our Lord is the Saviour of all who accept Him; and it is through Him as our Mediator that we have access to the heavenly Father. In fact, we cannot approach God except in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:6. Every prayer that we offer must be in and through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; but that does not mean that we merely repeat those words at the close of our prayers. That could be done without realizing at all the significance of the expression. Empty or meaningless phrases have no place in the prayers of those who are guided by the teaching of Jesus.

2. In order for a prayer to be offered in the name of Christ, it must be prompted by the mind of Christ and in reliance on the bond which unites us to Him. Therefore, to conclude our prayers with the words “through Jesus Christ our Lord” is very significant; and it is in order to ask, What do these words do for our prayers? This lesson will be an effort to answer this question.

## **I. They Give Us an Invitation to Pray**

1. Does it ever seem that prayer is a presumptuous thing on our part? God has the whole world on His hands, with over five billion people, besides the rest of the universe which is beyond our ability to conceive, but which must involve great concerns. Why, then, should we presume to bother him with our little personal problems? Cf. a private individual “bursting” unannounced into the private office of the head of a great business enterprise.

2. Furthermore, is not prayer regarded by many as a sign of weakness on the part of men. Should not strong and mature people handle their own affairs, rather than like children take them to God for His help? What would the average person think about the future of a great business if the chairman of the board, at a directors' meeting, should say, "Let us ask God to guide us in solving our problems; for they are too great for us?"

3. But it is neither presumptuous nor weakness to pray to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord" for Jesus makes that practice as natural as a child turning to his father. He makes us realize God's greatness and our littleness; and He teaches us to pray, saying, "Our Father who art in heaven." Cf. Phil. 4:6,7; Rom. 8:28; Heb. 13:5,6.

## **II. They Give Us a Test for Our Praying**

1. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground, He was surrendering His will to God's will; and that means more than relaxing the muscles and stretching out the body. It means to say, with the full realization of its significance, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." Cf. John 6:38. This is the attitude that we must have, if our prayers are to be in reality "in the name of Christ." See 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 John 5:14,15.

2. This, of course, implies that we cannot ask for just anything our hearts may desire. We must take God's will into consideration; and that should make us realize that Christ does not approve just anything that men may want. We may ask for help in our business, for health, etc., provided our ultimate aim is to please God and seek His glory. To pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord" is to sift the selfish motives from our petitions.

3. More than this, when we pray after this fashion the sights of our prayers are lifted — our horizons are enlarged toward the unattainable. Cf. Matt. 5:48; 6:10. We, of

course, shall never be perfect in this life, and the will of God will never be fully done on this earth; but if we stop praying and striving for those goals, what will happen? "Great lives are never self-contained."

### **III. They Give Us Power in Our Praying**

1. Strength comes to us when we consider the rightness of Christ. If one is lost in a strange region there is a great difference in the way he feels, if he has confidence in his guide.

2. It matters not how bewildered and confused we are in this life, we know that Christ is right, that He knows the way out, the answers to all our questions, and that He can abundantly supply our every need. Cf. John 8:12; 6:68; Phil. 4:19.

3. Stronger faith comes to us as the result of our following Christ with respect to His teaching and our practice with regard to prayer. God knows what we can do, and He makes us feel that if He knows it and we know it, why worry about what others may think or say?

4. When we pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord," we feel that we are in the presence of a heavenly Father who believes in us, who is counting on us to trust Him and do our part, and who loved us to the extent "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." It is in that feeling that we can do all things in Him that strengthens us.

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